

How to Help Yourself With Gaslighting



Most betrayed partners experience all four types of gaslighting from their cheating partner: lying, reality-manipulation, scapegoating, and coercion. For partners who have experienced this type of emotional manipulation and brainwashing, it may be quite some time before they're able to overcome this and to once again think clearly for themselves – trusting themselves to genuinely know what is real and true.

I often have partners who come to see me ask within the first session or two, "How will I ever trust my cheating spouse again?" My answer to them is that this is not the best question to be asking. The better question to ask is, "How will I rebuild trust with myself? How will I learn to trust my gut and know what I know?" Until you are able to trust yourself again, you will never trust your partner. Trust in your partner is based on trust in yourself and your ability to correctly perceive what is happening in the world and in your relationship.

Your first step in healing from the effects of gaslighting is beginning to believe the inner voice that resides deep in your gut and watches out for your best interests, trying to warn you, protect you, and help you notice and see the things that are important. Learning to trust your gut when it's speaking to you is one of the key tasks of your recovery. This is not always easy. As one of my clients so eloquently put it, "First I had to find my gut, and then I had to figure out how to listen to my gut. Only then could I finally start to trust my gut."

The second important step in healing from the effects of gaslighting is learning how to hold onto your own reality even when your reality and your significant other's reality do not align. This is challenging, particularly when it feels like so much is at stake if your partner is indeed lying to you.

Let's take our example from last week's blog post about finding two condoms in your significant other's briefcase and him denying knowing anything about them. If your spouse keeps on denying and not taking ownership, you can give up your reality and

decide to believe him (you can give in to the gaslighting) or you can decide that you are going to hold onto your reality despite his dogged insistence that his seemingly obvious lies are true.

In this case, you might tell yourself something like the following: “I don’t believe that those condoms got there by accident and I think there is probably something happening with my spouse that is scary for me and worries me. I can’t get him to tell me the truth about this right now, but I believe that something is wrong, and I am going to hold onto that belief until I have evidence that confirms that there is or is not a problem.”

Which leads us to the third skill you need to develop. And please don’t throw a shoe at me when I tell you this one because it does really stink, and I know it stinks, and I wish it were otherwise, but it ain’t. The third skill to develop is learning how to wait and see.

I know. I hate myself for even typing that. But it’s the truth so here we are.

What this means is that when you choose to hold onto your reality, you may have to enter a period where you wait for the truth to surface – for information that confirms that there is or isn’t a problem. In the case of the condoms in the briefcase, you might have to wait and watch to see if you notice other signs of cheating.

The hardest part about this is that it creates a rift in your relationship because by holding onto your reality and waiting to see if you have entered a place of mistrust in the relationship, your anxiety level skyrockets. When you don’t trust, you can’t relax. You are left living in the tension of a big, scary, unresolved issue. This is why waiting to see is both difficult and awful. But it is also often the only way to (eventually) get to the truth and to not abandon yourself to the gaslighting.

Lastly, when dealing with gaslighting, **YOU NEED SUPPORT**. If you believe that you are being lied to by your significant other and that he’s hiding secret behaviors, you need support in order to deal with that in a healthy way. You need other betrayed partners who are further down the road in recovery to give you advice about how they have dealt with similar situations and issues. You also need a skilled therapist who will help you hold onto your reality and confront it in appropriate ways. But mostly, you just need to know you are not alone.

If you feel as if you are being gaslighted and are in need of support, go to www.partnerhope.com and download my free eBook, *When It All Breaks Bad*. The chapter called *Get Expert Help* has links and resources that will help you find support in your area.