

Program Information

Name of Program: “Gaslighting – No, It’s Not Me, It’s You”

Created by: Robyn Norton

Target Audience: All grades

Strategy for Implementation: Discussion, followed by **scenario activity**, [video](#), more discussion

Time of Year to Implement: Anytime

Relevant Learning Goal: (3) Interpersonal Intelligence; (4) Intrapersonal Intelligence

Specific Lesson Outcomes:

- Students will display effective interpersonal communication skills such as effective conflict resolution strategies, verbal and nonverbal reactions in social situations and how they differ amongst individuals.
- Students will describe how the skills of communication, cooperation, and compromise are essential for healthy relationships.
- Students will identify ways to support their emotional wellness.
- Students will foster respect for self, others, and the community.

Purpose: Students will understand the definition, concept, and signs of gaslighting in personal interactions and relationships, as well as the negative outcomes of gaslighting on one's self-esteem, confidence, and trust.

Planning and Preparation:

1. In case you don't want to show the whole thing, or would like to just take parts from it, watch the TedTalk first, to decide what you might need or don't from it:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v4P2Qwh1QCU> (12 minutes; Trigger Warning: mentions of Suicide, Murder, Manipulation)
2. Familiarize yourself with the scenarios and examples in the program, but feel free to add in your own! Or, if you'd like, you can survey your wing the week before for scenarios when they've felt devalued, unimportant, or belittled, and anonymously use their own situations when going through the program.

Program Agenda

1. Ask students if they have examples or memories of a time when someone has disregarded their feelings during a conversation, or made them feel like they were wrong in what they were saying. Students don't necessarily have to share, but should show their agreement if it has happened to them.

- a. Remind students that it's more common than they might think, and that unfortunately, this type of thing happens to most people -- basically, *they are not alone* in having been made to feel this way at some point in time.
2. Ask students if they've ever heard of "gaslighting". If a student has a definition, feel free to let them share it. Acknowledge what was correct, and supplement it with this definition...
 - a. **Gaslighting:** A pattern of manipulation tactics often used by abusers, narcissists, and dictators to gain control over a person or people. The goal is to make the victim or victims question their own reality and trust/depend on the gaslighter to tell them what is "real".
 - b. The term comes from the 1944 film "Gaslight"

Movie premise: Years after her aunt was murdered in her home, a young woman moves back into the house with her new husband. However, he has a secret that he will do anything to protect, even if it means driving his wife insane.

 - i. Sounds extreme, yes... but imagine it on a smaller scale. *Has anyone in your life ever been stubborn or cruel enough to bully or try to confuse you into thinking that you're wrong, and they're right? Even when you know that what you heard was correct, or what you feel is valid? Has someone in your life ever made you think you were being "over-emotional, irrational, exaggerating, or crazy" for something you've said to them about what you think or feel? This often happens, on a smaller scale, when you're telling someone that something they've done has made you feel a certain way, and they use gaslighting to make you feel as though it's ridiculous or silly that you feel that way, and that they have, in fact, done nothing wrong.*
3. Explain that gaslighting takes on two major forms
 - a. The first: Invalidating someone's feelings about something by telling them that they're simply too emotional, dramatic, exaggerating, or blow everything out of proportion. This is that person's attempt to not only belittle your feelings, but make you feel like you may be crazy simply for feeling what you're feeling.
 - b. The second: Manipulating what someone is telling them by not only claiming the opposite, but purposely altering the facts or reality of the situation to make them think they saw or heard it wrong, or that perhaps it didn't even happen at all, also making them feel crazy.
 - c. The more common one you might experience is the first one, but it can easily spiral into the second over time, if a person is not aware that the first one is happening so frequently.
4. Begin the scenario activity with the students (whether you use the ones I have here, or the ones you've gathered from your own students) and go through each individually. Highlight key words, phrases or identifying factors that showcase the tactics being used by the gaslighter. If your wing liaison or a wing volunteer doesn't mind helping out, they can read them aloud in character, and you can follow up with highlighting the tactics, or ask students to identify them.

Scenarios: I'm honestly not sure why you're so upset about what I said. It was obviously a joke -- everyone understood that but you. So clearly, my joke isn't what the problem was.

- "Obviously" and "everyone but you" implies that you think differently than everyone else, and you aren't able to understand what was trying to be done, so you're clearly "what the problem was".

You're putting words in my mouth! I never said that, nor am I even the type of person that would ever imply that. What could even make you think such a thing? You must be imagining things.

- You're trying to tell them what they said, how could you know better than them what they said; that's ridiculous. You're questioning their character (which makes you feel badly, for doing so) and so you're imagining things.

I don't understand what is making you feel so angry about this. It's clear that you're overreacting, because I would never let myself be so upset by something like this. Maybe you can't control it, but either way, your insecurities are unhealthy.

- Because they wouldn't feel upset over this, they're telling you that you must be dramatic for doing so. Also implying that maybe it's "out of your control" because of something in your head, which is a tactic to make you feel crazy.

Why are you so dramatic about things? No matter what I say or do, you always find the negative. Is that just how your mind is wired? Anyone else I talk to is just fine with the way that I bring things up -- I think it's you that has the issue. You honestly sound crazy when you talk this way.

- This whole thing screams gaslighting. Telling you you're dramatic, and insinuating that you're always discounting them (instead of the other way around). Implying your mind is ill because you think this way, since everyone else seems to be fine with it.

Do mental health issues run in your family? I'm not trying to be rude, but, I genuinely don't think a mentally sound person would say what it is you're saying. Maybe you need help, and I can definitely get you that help.

- Again, implying mental health is at the root of why you're feeling and thinking the way you are. Trying to make themselves seem like the "good guy" by offering to help, further making you feel like you're the one who's wrong.

5. [Show the TedTalk](#) (12 minutes; and give the trigger warning) and discuss with students afterwards their thoughts and takeaways. Discuss the four strategies that she shares to deal with gaslighting, and how they can be utilized, even on a smaller scale, in situations we encounter with various different people over time; ones that may not just be a specific pattern of behavior we see from one person, but people around us as a whole.

- a. Remind students that, while gaslighting is often a tactic knowingly utilized by politicians, dictators, cult leaders, etc; it is possible that some people do it without realizing it. *That still does not make it okay*, but: recognizing that someone is gaslighting you, and removing yourself from that situation, is the best possible thing you can do for your own well-being. **It is not your responsibility to fix the person who is gaslighting you, even if you feel it's not their intent to do so.**

- b. Also emphasize that, for people who do see this repeated pattern of behavior with one specific person in their lives, however, that it is even more imperative that they recognize the signs, and remind themselves of the four tactics to handle it. Counseling or therapy are always good supports as well, though sometimes, simply talking to a few good friends who are removed from the situation can also help give you the peace of mind you need to know that *you're not crazy!* **It is not worth your own sanity to continue to share space or spend time with someone who is constantly gaslighting you. And again, family or not, it is not your job to fix them.**
6. Wrap up with any questions from students, or if there is anything particular they want to talk about in regards to the program as a whole.

Assessment Questions

1. Give an example of gaslighting that you now know you have experienced in your life; or, if you don't think you've personally experienced it, give an example that stuck out to you from the program, and say why.
2. What are a few phrases to be aware of when you're in a conversation where you think someone may be gaslighting you?
3. What are some of the negative effects that could happen to a person who has been a subject of gaslighting?
4. What are the four strategies that can help you deal with a gaslighter? Which do you feel will be the most difficult for you to work on, and why? (*If you decide not to utilize the video, don't use this question*)

Supplemental Available Material/Resources

You don't need to show it, or even have seen it yourself, but since the term comes from the film, I figured I'd link its information: Gaslight (1944) <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0036855/>

The premise of the film, which is where the term came from: Years after her aunt was murdered in her home, a young woman moves back into the house with her new husband. However, he has a secret that he will do anything to protect, even if it means driving his wife insane.

<http://stephaniesarkis.com/blog/talking-brains-episode-gaslighting-or-poor-communication/>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/here-there-and-everywhere/201701/11-warning-signs-gaslighting>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/here-there-and-everywhere/201701/are-gaslighters-aware-what-they-do>

TedTalk: How to Deal with Gaslighting -- <https://youtu.be/v4P2Qwh1QCU> (TW: mentions of Suicide, Murder, Manipulation)