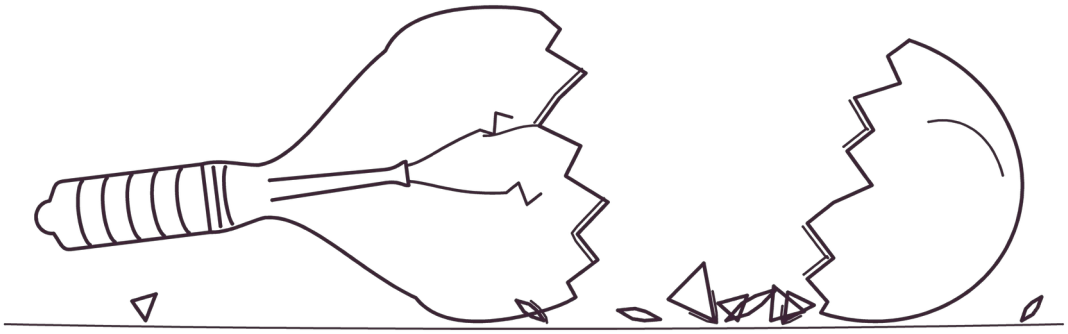
sage & atlas

Words for What Happened

A companion to Field Note 002.



Gaslighting is when someone repeatedly makes you doubt what you saw, heard, or remember — until you start trusting them more than yourself.

Gaslighting has two parts: what someone does, and how it slowly shakes your trust in yourself.

Read at your own pace. You can stop at any time.

This is education, not therapy or a diagnosis.

What it can sound like

It can show up in everyday words, said again and again.

"That never happened."

"You're too sensitive."

"You're remembering it wrong."

"I never said that."

"You're always twisting things."

"Everyone agrees with me."

"You're imagining it."

"You're overreacting."

What it can feel like

Over time, you might notice:

— Checking your memory before you speak

— Apologizing without knowing why

— Second-guessing what you saw or heard

— Feeling confused, or beginning to question whether you can trust your own judgment

— Trusting their account more than your own

What it's not

A single disagreement, lie, or difference in memory is not automatically gaslighting. These statements can be hurtful, but context and patterns matter. What deserves attention is whether repeated behavior undermines your confidence in your own perceptions and memories. Feeling uncertain is not proof, and recognizing a pattern does not require diagnosing anyone.

An example

A composite, not a real person's story

> *After a tense evening, Paige remembers a specific comment.*
> *Her partner says it never happened — then that Paige is*
> *"too sensitive" and "always twisting things."*
> *Over time, Paige starts checking her own memory before speaking.*

A moment to consider

The prompts are optional. You do not have to write anything down. Skip either one if it does not feel useful or safe.

What do I remember happening, in my own words?

Do I notice a recurring pattern, or a one-time rupture?

If keeping this sheet is not safe, you can leave it. Shared devices and printed pages are not always private. Confrontation and documentation are not always safe.

> **IF YOU WANT TO TALK WITH SOMEONE · 24/7, FREE AND CONFIDENTIAL**
>
> National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 (SAFE) · Text START to 88788 · thehotline.org
>
> RAINN, National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-4673 (HOPE) · Text HOPE to 64673 · rainn.org
>
> If you are in immediate danger, call 911. Seeking support is a judgment only you can make.

DARVO is a related pattern, but it is distinct from gaslighting. It is explored separately.

References

Sage & Atlas Group. (2026, November 8). *Gaslighting Is Not a Difference of Opinion* (Field Note No. 002). https://sageandatlasgroup.com/field-notes/gaslighting-is-not-a-difference-of-opinion/

Sweet, P. L. (2019). The sociology of gaslighting. *American Sociological Review, 84*(5), 851–875. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419874843

This sheet is not a diagnostic tool.