Gas lighting is a manipulative behavior that predators and abusers use to gain control over their victims. **The goal of gas lighting behavior is to undermine the target’s perceptions of reality so that they are dependent on the abuser’s interpretation of reality.** Abusers want their victims to doubt themselves, their experience and even whether they know right from wrong, truth from lie. By doing this they can control the victim’s behavior and sometimes even their thinking.

**An example of gas lighting behavior:**

A family is gathered around the dining room table enjoying Christmas Dinner. A child at the table has a cast on one arm. A relative asks him what happened. Before the boy can answer his father says, “He’s so clumsy. He couldn’t walk across a room without falling down or knocking something over. He fell down the stairs.” The teenager protests “No, I didn’t, Dad. You were right behind me and you pushed me”. The entire family gasps, shocked at the accusation. “I most certainly did not. How dare you accuse me of that. I was right behind you but I know how clumsy you are and I reached out to keep you from falling. How dare you blame me! Apologize, this instant!” The child is horrified and humiliated at this public shaming and admonition. But everyone in the family is clearly on his father’s side. No one is on his. He issues an apology and doesn’t talk the rest of the meal.

Again, the goal of gas lighting is to undermine the victim’s belief in the ability to see and know the truth. **Over time persistent and repetitive gas lighting will erode a victim’s self-esteem and trust in their own thinking, leaving them dependent on their abuser to think for them.**

* Gas lighting is used not only by the abuser, but also their enablers and family members to uphold their denial of the truth of the family dysfunction.

**Tips and Strategies to Combat Gas Lighting:**

- Become aware of what Gas Lighting is and identify its presence in your past and present-day relationships.
- If you have safe relationships with family members who witnessed this Gas Lighting behavior talk about your experience with them, compare notes and validate the truth of what happened/is happening.
- Begin the process of learning to trust yourself, your perceptions and your interpretations of reality again – start small, practice, get validation and support from your safe community.
- Sometimes we can only see the Gas Lighting behavior with great clarity when we are no longer a part of the dysfunctional relationship – you may need to alter your involvement in toxic relationships to be completely free of Gas Lighting’s influence.
- Re-program your self-talk if it supports the Gas Lighting done in your past: “I’m not clumsy. I’m graceful and steady on my feet”.
- Rewrite your story knowing the truth now, ridding it of the lies and deception your family, abuser(s) and enablers may have taught you.