

Linda Roggli:

It's October 2020, and even in the midst of a crazy year, it's still ADHD Awareness Month. And we're still here with TADD Talks from ADDA, the Attention Deficit Disorder Association, nine minute, short, pithy soundbites on living with adult ADHD. Stay tuned, here it comes.

Dr. Stephanie Sarkis:

Hi everyone, I'm Dr. Stephanie Sarkis, and I'm going to be moderating a presentation at CHADD this year at the conference on "How to Become an ADHD Influencer." So I'm going to talk a little bit about gaslighting though, for my TADD Talk. So gaslighting is a form of manipulation where you have someone that is purposely trying to cause you turmoil, causing you to question your reality, and the goal is to keep you off-kilter so that they can have more control over you. People with ADHD are more prone to this type of personality. You see this, sometimes in narcissistic personality disorder, antisocial personality disorder, and you can also see it without those disorders as well. And the person with ADHD may be told that they're irresponsible and they can't handle things and so the person will say, well, I'll take over all the finances. Or sometimes I've seen couples where the gaslighter will hide belongings and then say that the person is too irresponsible and so they can't be trusted.

Dr. Stephanie Sarkis:

And again, the goal is the gaslighter is trying to get you to question your reality. And I think because, you know, people with ADHD, myself included—I have ADHD—tend to maybe not fully trust intuition because we've been told that, you know, our brains are different than other people's. So you may think that, well, this person's looking out for me, but the slippery slope happens where what you thought, in the beginning, was someone looking out for you turns into controlling behavior. So there's a part of gaslighting can be economic-financial abuse, and that's where money is withheld from you, or you're forced to turn over your paycheck to your partner. Of course, you can see it in ADHD, sometimes there's an agreement between the partners that someone's going to keep track of the money, but that's different than economic-financial abuse. That's where again, you have to earn your money back from your partner, or you need to ask for money from your partner, or you have to justify why you need money, and you're supposed to turn over all your money to your partner. And again, that sets up a power dynamic that is pretty unhealthy.

Dr. Stephanie Sarkis:

So there's also the emotional-psychological form of abuse, which is where you are told that you're less than, in different ways. You are criticized over your body type. You are compared to other people. You are told that the issues that you're having are because you're crazy or other people think you're crazy. That happens when in a gaslighting relationship, the person that's not the gaslighter will be told that there's something wrong with them. They're continually told also that if you go and tell somebody about this, nobody's going to believe you because the gaslighter will say, well, I have this, you know, reputation in the community that no one's going to believe you. So you're told over and over again that you're crazy, that no one's going to believe you if you report the abuse. And that's why people tend to stay in these relationships so long is because they're isolated, and they don't feel like there's anybody they can really reach out to for help. And again, if you have ADHD or depression or anxiety, people with gaslighting tendencies tend to sense out vulnerability. And you know with ADHD that we've been through a lot of things where our self-esteem may not be in the best place, or we are trying to—we kind of unconsciously look for someone that kind of has their act together. And so what that can turn into is that someone that looks like they're very organized and together can also have a flip side of being very controlling.

Dr. Stephanie Sarkis:

So if you're in a relationship with a gaslighter, one of the best things to do is just go No Contact. That's easier, of course, if you don't have kids with a gaslighter, but going No Contact means that you are not reaching out to them, you're blocking their emails, their phone numbers so they can't get ahold of you. And that's really important because the gaslighter, once they sense that you're gone, that narcissistic void they have, that narcissistic void kicks in. And so they want you to come back because that's the way they feel whole. So they'll do something called hoovering, which is kind of sucking you back into the

relationship; and they'll either do that through finding other ways to contact you or they will seek out flying monkeys.

Dr. Stephanie Sarkis:

And what I mean by flying monkeys: these are people, friends, and family that will contact you, or come up to you and say, Hey, you know, I know this person really loves you, and they want to get back together with you; maybe you should give it a shot? And you need to make it very clear to these people saying these messages, that this person is not a topic of conversation. So also the gaslighter will triangulate, meaning that they'll pit fights between you and other people by saying, like, your sister said something about you that she really didn't say. So when you do leave the gaslighter, it's really important to contact those people you may have isolated yourself from so you can rebuild those relationships. Usually what the gaslighter claims this person said about you is not true at all. And also it's really important to take good care of yourself.

Dr. Stephanie Sarkis:

It's important to get enough sleep. See a doctor if you're having a really hard time getting to sleep. Take your ADHD medication as prescribed. Again, go see your doctor if you feel like it's not helping, or if you are feeling like—if you're feeling hopeless, please contact your doctor or your therapist. Also, if you have kids with a gaslighter, set up a really detailed parenting plan that determines, you know, what time children are going to be exchanged at what location—I recommend meeting at a neutral location, or even having—if this is high conflict and there's been domestic violence in the past because gaslighting is domestic violence—you can have someone and a friend or family exchange your children with your ex or a representative for your ex. And you can get very detailed plans because gaslighters tend to twist plans around and then try to make it look like it's your fault.

Dr. Stephanie Sarkis:

So make sure you have a pretty detailed parenting plan that names you on what dates you see the kids, what times they'll be dropped off, holidays, finances, child support, payment for medical expenses; you want to get that all very detailed because the gaslighter tries to find a way around that stuff a lot of times. You can even use an app like Talking Parents and Our Family Wizard, that they will—you can communicate through those rather than through phone or by text because communicating by phone or text can cause a lot of issues, especially when you have somebody that's very manipulative; they'll push your buttons. So talking through a parenting app can really cut down a lot of that stress. So if you're in a relationship with a gaslighter, know that if you have ADHD, you're prone to being in a relationship with a person like this. The ideal is to go No Contact with this person, but you also have options too, if you have kids, to have a detailed parenting plan.

Dr. Stephanie Sarkis:

So I'm Stephanie Sarkis and I'm at StephanieSarkis.com, and I am the author of *Gaslighting: Recognize Manipulative People . . . — let me make sure I get my title, right— . . . Recognize Manipulative and Emotionally Abusive People - - and Break Free*. So there is a lot of hope you can get away from people like this and you can go on to having happy, healthy relationships.

Linda Roggli:

Okay. That's today's ADHD wisdom much more to come and why not join us for the Virtual 2020 International ADHD Conference coming up in November? Details at ADD.org. And while you're at it, why not join ADDA? It's a great investment in your ADHD life.