

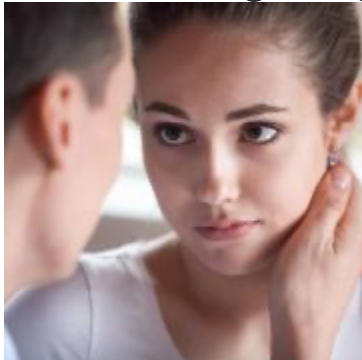
# What to Be Aware Of: RED FLAGS (Risks/ Challenges/ Struggles in Relationships)

## Gaslighting

Reviewed by Psychology Today Staff

Gaslighting is an insidious form of manipulation and psychological control. Victims of gaslighting are deliberately and systematically fed false information that leads them to question what they know to be true, often about themselves. They may end up doubting their memory, their perception, and even their sanity. Over time, a gaslighter's manipulations can grow more complex and potent, making it increasingly difficult for the victim to see the truth.

### How Gaslighting Works



The term gaslighting comes from [a 1938 play, \*Gas Light\*](#), and its film adaptation. Gaslighting can occur in personal or professional relationships, and victims are targeted at the core of their being: their sense of identity and self-worth. Manipulative people who engage in gaslighting do so to attain power over their victims, either because they simply derive warped enjoyment from the act or because they wish to emotionally, physically or financially control their victim.

How does gaslighting change a victim?

Gaslighting can be psychologically devastating. It violates trust, upends a person's view that people are generally good, and can make them suspicious of everyone who is close to them. Falling victim to a gaslighter also [erodes a person's trust in themselves](#) and makes them forget what they once valued about themselves; after all, it's easy to blame themselves for having been too

trusting, vulnerable, or dependent. The experience may make a victim never want to be part of a relationship again.

# Breadcrumbing

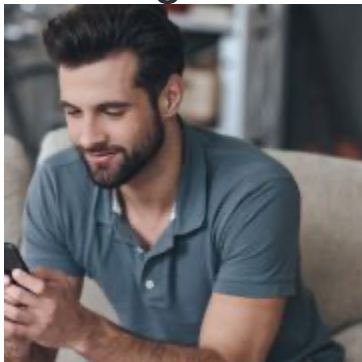
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Breadcrumbing is a term for stringing someone along with small nuggets of communication—but never fully committing to a relationship. Today those crumbs of communication tend to occur online. The person may respond to an Instagram story, like a Facebook photo, or text a funny meme. They may text back and forth periodically but never seem to agree to plans in person. The connection stalls, unable to evolve into a fulfilling relationship.

This ambiguity can feel confusing and hurtful to those on the receiving end. Maintaining hope that the relationship will progress, a breadcrumbee may struggle to realize what's happening or end the relationship.

Bread crumbing typically refers to romantic relationships, but it can occur in other personal and professional relationships as well.

## The Signs of Bread crumbing



Bread crumbing can be a confusing experience; learning to spot the signals can help people name the behavior and process it. The [signs](#) include:

Behaviors you can observe from the bread crumbler:

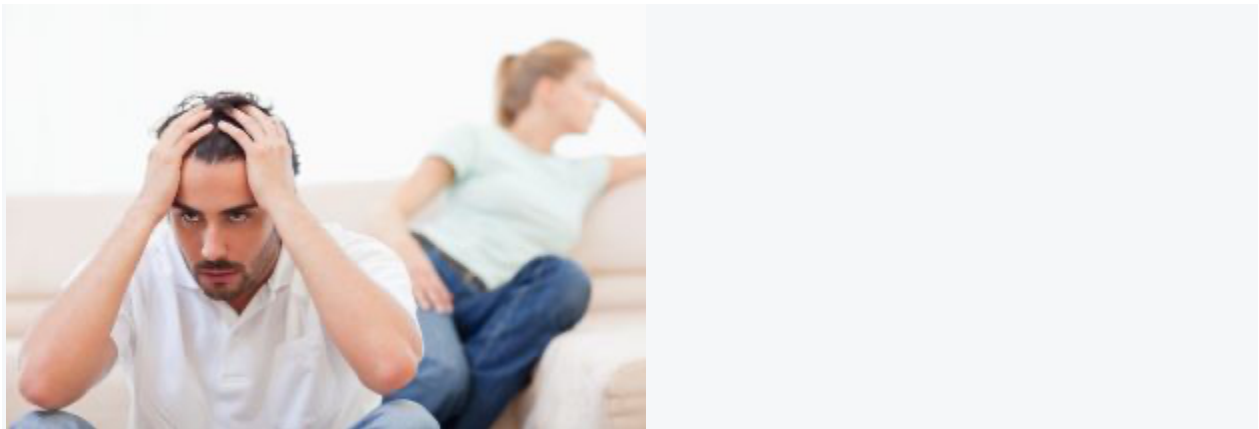
- Inconsistent and erratic communication
- Speaking via text or social media but not committing to spend time together in person

- Not following through on plans that are made
- Surface-level communication that lacks depth, vulnerability, or details about the person's life
- An imbalanced relationship—they don't reciprocate your level of interest
- Focusing on the physical side of the relationship rather than focusing on all sides of the relationship

Feelings you can observe in yourself

- Feeling confused and uncertain about the state of the relationship
- Feeling a roller coaster of emotion, such as sad, then hopeful, then disappointment once again
- Feeling self-doubt, such as questioning if you did something wrong
- Feeling anxious or dependent on the bread crumb for the next point of contact
- Feeling used or manipulated
- Feeling badly about yourself after interacting with them
- Feeling lonely or hopeless about the relationship

Warning Signs and How to Help:



My all-time most popular post on PsychologyToday.com is about [50 signs of a healthy relationship](#). Today, we look at the flipside—warning signs of a *toxic* relationship. While many relationships may display one or two of these,

toxic relationships will often feature multiple alarm bells. (Where I've written *your partner*, read it as *you or your partner*.)

## Relationship Warning Signs

1. You never turn to each other for emotional support. You look to other people first.
2. Your partner actively tries to cut you off from your support network of friends and family.
3. Your partner implies that you are stupid, or that they are "the smart one" in the relationship; they try to dissuade you from trying something new because "you probably won't understand it."
4. Your partner doesn't respect your answer when you say "no" to something.
5. Your partner implies that they only value you for one thing, whether it be sex, your looks, or your ability to earn money.
6. You can't identify any ways you've positively influenced each other. For example, you haven't adopted any of each other's interests or taught each other any new skills.
7. You *can* identify ways you've negatively influenced each other, particularly harmful habits like heavy drinking, laziness, or smoking.
8. Your partner doesn't make you feel good about your body; they point out your thinning hair or saggy underarm skin.
9. You don't have a sense of relationship security—you've broken up or almost broken up numerous times.
10. You end up doing things you're ashamed of in the course of interacting with each other, such as screaming at each other in front of your kids.
11. Your partner is dismissive of your emotions, especially fear, such as when you say you're scared because they drive too fast or erratically but they won't slow down.
12. Your partner involves you in unethical activities, such as lying on official forms you both sign.
13. You feel worse about yourself as a person than when you started the relationship—you're less confident and can see fewer positive qualities about yourself.

14. You don't feel able to get your partner's attention when you want to talk about something important.
15. Your partner mocks you, such as poking fun at your voice or facial expressions in a mean way.
16. Your partner doesn't seem interested when you experience success, or they belittle your success.
17. You don't feel able to confide in your partner. If you were to reveal something that you're sensitive about, you're not sure if they'd react respectfully or helpfully.
18. Your partner makes jokes about leaving you or teases you about what their "second" wife or husband will be like.
19. When you're not physically together, it feels like "out of sight, out of mind." For example, your partner is on an international trip and says they'll call when they arrived safely at the hotel but doesn't follow through.
20. When you and your partner disagree, they insist you do things their way or leave. It's their way or the highway, and you don't have a sense that when you disagree you'll find a way of coming together.
21. You're not sure how dependable, supportive, or reliable your partner would be in a situation in which you really needed them; for example, if you or a close family member got cancer.
22. You blame your partner for your life not being as satisfying as you'd like it to be—or they blame you.
23. Your partner is dismissive of your interests and projects. They judge the things you do by how important *they* perceive them to be, rather than how important they are to *you*.
24. Stonewalling. You or your partner flat-out refuse to talk about important relationship topics, such as the decision to have a baby.
25. You don't think your partner would make a good parent, if you're pondering having children in the future.
26. There are times you avoid coming home because going to Starbucks, or a bar, is more relaxing after a stressful day than coming home to your partner.
27. Your life together seems out of control; for example, you both spend much more than you earn.

28. You can't think of ways in which you and your partner make a great team.
29. Your partner is the source of negative surprises, such as large unexpected charges on your joint credit card.
30. You catch your partner lying repeatedly.
31. Your partner goes out but doesn't tell you where, or fails to arrive home when expected and has no explanation.
32. You worry that your partner might get so angry that they'd hurt you.
33. You have a sense of being trapped in the relationship.
34. When you argue, one or both of you always just gets defensive. You can never acknowledge that the other person has some valid points.
35. When you argue, you just blame each other rather than each accepting some blame.
36. You're very critical of each other, and you feel constantly nitpicked about the ways you're not "good enough."
37. Your partner complains about you to their friends or family.
38. You find yourself lying to other people because you're ashamed of your partner's behavior; for example, making excuses for why they haven't shown up to an event as planned.
39. You feel lonely when you're together.
40. If you had to rate your partner on a scale of 1 to 10 on qualities like warmth, trustworthiness, and dependability, you would rate them lower than 5.
41. You can't recall a time when your partner has compromised so that you could take up an opportunity.
42. There is an absence of affection in your relationship—you rarely kiss, touch, or smile at each other.
43. Your partner is coercive when it comes to sex.
44. Your partner sees themselves as having a much higher "mate value" than you. They think you're lucky to have them, but not the reverse.

45. Your partner keeps you at arms length emotionally. You don't have a healthy sense of interdependence.
46. Your partner frequently compares you unfavorably to other people, especially friends' spouses or partners.
47. When you argue, it quickly escalates to ultimatums or threats—"If you don't ..., I'll ..."
48. You can think of several friends or colleagues whom you'd rather be in a relationship with.
49. Cheating.
50. The other "C" word: "Crazy." If you call each other "crazy" during arguments, it's a pretty bad sign. It shows that you're no longer willing to listen to each other's point of view because you've written it off as irrational.
51. Relationship violence.

#### How to Help and What to Do:

. *Review past negative behaviors - start by distancing yourself from denial.* This is a difficult first step to take as it requires an honest evaluation of how you feel about your relationship. Ask yourself if, when spending time with him/her, are you energized or drained. Do you feel like you *have* to spend time with, or do you feel sorry for him/her? Are you the giver and she/he the taker? Does your time with him/her leave you feeling put down, angry, disappointed or frustrated? Do you really like her/him?

2. *Discover how you feel in the present - start by identifying the benefits in the relationship.* Relationships, including toxic ones, have paybacks. If they didn't, we wouldn't stay in them. We may be reluctant to delve into what it is exactly we get from a toxic relationship, but it's important to dig deep here. Ask yourself if he/she makes you feel good - or guilty - in some way; or if he/she reminds you of another toxic person from your past. The latter is particularly tough to look at because she/he may unconsciously be providing you with a deep-seeded toxic comfort level.

3. *Practice selected present hedonism - fill the hole left behind from ending the relationship.* Do things that make you feel better and in ways so that you don't have to rely on others. For instance, revisit that project you put on the

back burner, learn meditation or yoga, call friends, and remind yourself that you won't feel this way (sad, angry, upset) forever.

4. *Be pro-social – surround yourself with positive people.* Hopefully these folks are working on their boundaries as hard as you are and aren't enmeshed in their own share of toxic relationships and therefore become somewhat toxic themselves. The stuff is contagious. Be smart with whom you choose to hang out.

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5. *Replace past negatives with a bright future positive.* Work toward healing the part of yourself that may be attracting toxic relationships. This may mean exploring past toxic relationships, forgiving yourself for the part you played and realizing that you deserve the right kind of love and attention in order to create a brighter future for yourself.

How to help others struggling with toxicity in Interpersonal Relationships:

To help someone struggling in relationships with others, you can: actively listen and empathize with their experiences, encourage open communication, validate their feelings, suggest seeking professional help if needed, offer support in identifying unhealthy patterns, and provide practical advice on building healthy relationships; always respecting their boundaries and autonomy while making it clear that you care and are there for them.

Green Flags within Relationships:

Key green flags in a relationship:

- **Open and honest communication:** Being able to openly discuss feelings, needs, and concerns with your partner without fear of judgment.
- **Respect for boundaries:** Recognizing and respecting each other's personal space and needs.
- **Mutual trust:** Believing in your partner's loyalty and reliability.
- **Shared values and goals:** Aligning on core beliefs and having similar aspirations for the future.
- **Supportive behavior:** Encouraging your partner's dreams and celebrating their achievements.



- **Active listening:** Paying attention to what your partner is saying and trying to understand their perspective.
- **Ability to compromise:** Willingness to work together to find solutions during disagreements.
- **Emotional intelligence:** Recognizing and managing your own emotions, and being empathetic towards your partner's feelings.
- **Respectful conflict resolution:** Addressing issues calmly and constructively, without resorting to manipulation or aggression.
- **Celebrating individuality:** Supporting each other's hobbies and interests outside of the relationship.