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# STEPWISE RECOVERY

## The Sponsor Guide

A Practical Framework for Guiding Others Through Recovery

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*Supporting sponsees with clarity, compassion, and the Six-Lens Framework. Because the best sponsors never stop learning.*

### What Is Sponsorship?

Sponsorship is one of the oldest and most powerful traditions in Twelve Step recovery. At its heart, it is one person who has walked the path of recovery sharing their experience, strength, and hope with another who is earlier in their journey.

A sponsor is not a therapist, counsellor, or authority figure. A sponsor is someone who has worked the Steps themselves, who continues to grow in their own recovery, and who makes themselves available to guide another person through the same process.

### Why Sponsorship Matters

Recovery can feel isolating, confusing, and overwhelming. A sponsor provides something that meetings alone cannot: personalised, one-to-one guidance. For the sponsor, the relationship is equally valuable. As the fellowships remind us, we keep what we have by giving it away.

### Qualities of a Good Sponsor

#### Lived Experience

A good sponsor has worked the Steps themselves and speaks from experience, not theory.

#### Willingness to Listen

The best sponsors resist the urge to jump in with solutions and instead create space.

#### Honesty with Compassion

They challenge thinking patterns without attacking the person.

#### Consistency and Availability

Regular contact, returned calls, and a steady presence build trust.

#### Healthy Boundaries

They know where their role begins and ends, and when to refer to professionals.

## Getting Started as a Sponsor

### Signs You May Be Ready to Sponsor

- You have worked through all Twelve Steps with your own sponsor
- You have a stable foundation and attend meetings regularly
- You feel a genuine desire to help others, not just an obligation
- You are willing to make time and be available
- You continue to work on your own growth
- You have discussed sponsoring with your own sponsor or trusted peers

### The First Conversation

The first conversation sets the tone. Be clear about what sponsorship is and what it is not. Key areas to cover: how often you will be in contact, what working the Steps together will look like, the importance of honesty, and what happens if either party needs to end the relationship.

## Using the Six-Lens Framework in Sponsorship

The Six-Lens Framework is particularly valuable in sponsorship. When a sponsee is stuck, struggling, or not connecting with a concept, the framework gives you six different perspectives to try.

### Lens 1: Identification and Denial

Help your sponsee see themselves in the content. Share your own experience to break through the "I'm different" defence.

### Lens 2: Powerlessness

Explore the reality of powerlessness. Help your sponsee distinguish between wanting to stop and being able to stop.

### Lens 3: Turning Point / Surrender

Highlight moments of choice. Support them through the fear that often accompanies surrender.

### Lens 4: Spiritual Experience

Open the door to spiritual awareness without forcing beliefs. Focus on practical results.

### Lens 5: Passing It On

Show how service strengthens recovery. Even in early recovery, small acts of service build connection.

### Lens 6: Spiritual Resistance

Normalise resistance. When a sponsee pushes back, this is not failure — it deserves gentle exploration.

## Working Through the Steps with a Sponsee

### General Principles

- Share experience, not instructions
- Work at their pace, not yours
- Ask questions more than you give answers
- Be honest about your own struggles
- Apply the Six-Lens Framework throughout

### Steps One to Three: The Foundation

These Steps establish the groundwork: admitting powerlessness, believing that change is possible, and making a decision to pursue it. Use the Identification lens to help your sponsee recognise patterns. Use Powerlessness to explore why self-will has failed. Use Turning Point to illuminate the decision ahead.

### Steps Four to Seven: Self-Examination

Deep self-examination and becoming willing to change. Encourage thoroughness but not perfectionism. The Resistance lens is particularly useful here, as sponsees often resist the very self-examination that would set them free.

### Steps Eight and Nine: Making Amends

The amends process is where recovery becomes tangible. Help your sponsee prepare properly and distinguish between helpful and harmful amends. The Passing It On lens reminds us that making amends models accountability.

### Steps Ten to Twelve: Ongoing Growth

These Steps move from intensive work into sustainable daily practice. The Spiritual Experience lens becomes particularly relevant as ongoing recovery deepens awareness.

## Common Challenges in Sponsorship

### When Your Sponsee Relapses

Relapse is a reality. Your response matters enormously. This is not a time for judgement — it is a time for compassion, honesty, and a return to basics.

- Remain calm and compassionate
- Ensure they are safe — medical attention takes priority
- Encourage them to come back to meetings as soon as possible
- Help them identify what led to the relapse, without blame
- Revisit the early Steps together
- Remind them that relapse is not the end of their story

### When Boundaries Are Tested

Some sponsees may test boundaries. Clear boundaries protect both of you. It is not unkind to say, "I am not the right person to help with that."

### **When You Do Not Know the Answer**

No sponsor knows everything. Saying "I do not know, but let me think about it" demonstrates the kind of humility recovery is built upon.

### **When the Relationship Is Not Working**

Not every pairing will be effective. It is far better to acknowledge this openly and help them find a more suitable sponsor.

### **Knowing When to Refer**

Recognising when a sponsee needs support beyond what you can offer is a sign of strength, not failure. Consider professional referral when:

- Severe mental health difficulties (depression, anxiety, psychosis, self-harm)
- History of trauma requiring specialist therapeutic support
- Thoughts of suicide or self-harm
- Complex medical needs related to addiction or withdrawal
- Relationship or family difficulties requiring professional counselling
- You feel out of your depth — trust that feeling

### **Looking After Yourself as a Sponsor**

Sponsorship can be deeply rewarding, but it can also be emotionally demanding. Your recovery comes first, always.

- Continue attending meetings and working with your own sponsor
- Remember that your sponsee's recovery is their responsibility
- Talk to other sponsors about challenges
- Model healthy boundaries — this is one of the most important things you can do

#### **UK Support Services**

Samaritans: 116 123 | FRANK: 0300 123 6600 | NA UK: 0300 999 1212

SHOUT: Text 85258 | NHS: Contact your GP for referrals

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