



The Six-Lens Sponsorship Tool

A free recovery resource from Stepwise Recovery

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STEPWISE RECOVERY

Six-Lens Sponsorship Tool

A working guide for sponsors to meet sponsees where they are

Good sponsoring starts with listening. When a sponsee brings you a problem, a feeling, or a stuck place, they're offering you clues about what they need. This tool helps you recognise which of the six lenses will best serve them right now. Each lens is a different way of looking at recovery — and sometimes a sponsee needs one lens, sometimes another. Use this to ask better questions and help them see what they're ready to see.

Identification and Denial

What it is: Recognising yourself in another person's story, and hearing the voice that says 'I'm not that bad.'

When to reach for this lens

Use this when your sponsee is comparing themselves to others—and either deciding they're not as bad, or catastrophising that they're the worst. This is the ground floor of recovery. Denial often sounds like minimising, or like spotting the other person's problem but not their own.

- 'I'm not as bad as them'
- 'I can control my use, they can't'
- 'My situation is different'
- 'I don't have a real problem'
- 'Everyone drinks/uses like this'
- Refusing to see patterns in their own behaviour

Questions to ask

- When you say you're not as bad as [other person], what would it take for you to be that bad? What's your line?
- What's one thing that person does that you do too—that you haven't said out loud before?

Powerlessness

What it is: The shift from 'I can fix this if I try harder' to 'I can't do this alone.'

When to reach for this lens

Powerlessness is not despair. It's the honesty that comes after fighting stops. A sponsee treading this lens is often worn out, maybe humbled, maybe finally ready. They've tried willpower and it hasn't lasted. Reaching for this lens means they're ready to ask for help—from you, from others, from something beyond themselves.

- 'I've tried everything and nothing works'
- 'I keep saying I'll quit and then I use again'
- 'I don't know why I do this'
- 'I can't stop even though I want to'
- 'Every time I promise myself it will be different, and it isn't'
- Exhaustion, surrender in their voice

Questions to ask

- Tell me about a time you made a decision not to use, and what happened instead. What does that tell you?
- What would it feel like to ask for help instead of handling it on your own?

Turning Point / Surrender

What it is: The moment of yes. Admitting defeat becomes the door to change.

When to reach for this lens

This lens is for the critical hinge. Your sponsee has stopped fighting. They're ready to try something different, to trust you, to trust the process, even if they're scared. This is where they're vulnerable and open. Support them here with clarity and calm. Turning Point isn't one moment—it can happen again and again—but each time, recognise it for what it is: a choice, made in the light.

- 'I can't do this my way anymore'
- 'I'm ready to do what it takes'
- 'I'm scared, but I'm going to try'
- 'I'll do whatever the steps say, even if I don't understand it yet'
- 'I'm choosing recovery, even though I don't know what that means'
- Showing up consistently, even on hard days

Questions to ask

- What made today different? What's shifted for you?
- What will you do when the fear comes back—because it will. Who will you call?

Spiritual Experience

What it is: A sense of something beyond oneself—connection, meaning, grace, or being held by something larger.

When to reach for this lens

Spiritual experience doesn't mean religion. It might be a moment of clarity, a feeling of being known, a shift from isolation to belonging. It might happen in a meeting, in nature, in service, or in a conversation. Watch for when your sponsee describes relief, hope, or a sense of being looked after. This is where recovery stops being about stopping use and starts being about building a life worth living.

- 'I felt something lift off me'
- 'For the first time, I felt like I wasn't alone'
- 'I can't explain it, but something changed'
- 'I belong here'
- 'I felt peace'
- Noticing that the obsession to use has quieted

Questions to ask

- Tell me what that moment felt like. What were you doing, and what changed?
- What would it look like to open yourself to more of that?

Spiritual Resistance and Ego Defence

What it is: Fear, shame, pride, and self-protection rising up. The voice that says 'I can't admit that' or 'I don't need to change that.'

When to reach for this lens

Resistance is not wilfulness. It's the old self protecting itself against change. Your sponsee might be arguing, rationalising, deflecting, or digging in. They might be ashamed of something and hiding behind anger. This is not the moment to push. This is the moment to name what's happening with gentleness and clarity, and to wait. The ego's defences make sense—they kept them alive. Honour that. Then invite them to notice what they're protecting.

- 'I'm not doing that step, it doesn't apply to me'
- 'That part of my past is nobody's business'
- 'I'm fine, I don't need to change anything else'
- 'Nobody understands my situation'
- Getting defensive when you ask a simple question
- Intellectualising instead of feeling

Questions to ask

- What would happen if you let that wall down for a minute? What are you afraid of?
- I notice you push back on this particular thing. What's that about for you?

Passing It On

What it is: Service, sponsoring, carrying the message. Recovery that flows outward.

When to reach for this lens

This lens is about action beyond themselves. Whether it's chairing a meeting, being of use in the fellowship, or starting to sponsor someone else, your sponsee is stepping into the principle that we keep what we have by giving it away. Watch for generosity and connection. That's the sign that spiritual experience has rooted itself in practice.

- 'I want to sponsor someone'
- 'How can I help at the meeting?'
- 'I feel like I should give something back'
- 'Seeing them recover makes me want to stay sober'
- 'I've got something to offer'
- Finding joy in being useful

Questions to ask

- What did someone do for you when you needed it? How could you do that for someone else?
- What happens inside you when you help another person?

Quick Reference and Risk

IDENTIFICATION AND DENIAL — 'I'm not that bad.' Ask: What would it take? What do you do that they do?

POWERLESSNESS — 'I can't do this alone.' Ask: What happened when you tried alone? What would asking for help feel like?

TURNING POINT / SURRENDER — 'I'm ready.' Ask: What's shifted? Who will you call when the fear comes?

SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE — 'Something changed in me.' Ask: Tell me that moment. How do you stay open to more?

SPIRITUAL RESISTANCE AND EGO DEFENCE — 'I'm not doing that.' Ask: What would happen if you let that down? What are you afraid of?

PASSING IT ON — 'I want to help.' Ask: What did someone do for you? What do you feel when you help? ... If your sponsee is in crisis, talking about self-harm, or relapsing repeatedly, that's beyond sponsorship. Encourage them to speak to their GP, call NHS 111, or contact Samaritans on 116 123.

If they're under 19 and in distress, Childline is 0800 1111. You're their sponsor, not their doctor. Point them toward help, and stay present as their sponsor.

Keep going — you're not alone

This resource is one of a full library of free tools, worksheets and reading at stepwiserecovery.com/resources — take what helps and leave the rest. These tools are designed to sit alongside fellowship programmes, meetings and sponsorship — never to replace them.

The Stepwise Recovery Guides

Substance-specific recovery guides written by people who've recovered — for cocaine, ketamine, families, young people, and children. Free preview chapters, no email required, at stepwiserecovery.com/guides

Our 1-in-10 Pledge

For every ten guides sold, we donate one to someone who can't afford it — through treatment centres and prison recovery programmes.

Need help right now?

Samaritans: 116 123 (free, 24 hours) · FRANK: 0300 123 6600

Narcotics Anonymous UK: 0300 999 1212 · SHOUT: text 85258

Childline (under 19s): 0800 1111 · Nacoda: 0800 358 3456