

The Recovery Lifeline Plan

Built when things are good. Reached for when they aren't.

Before you build this

This document is not for everyone, and being honest about that up front matters.

If you are cycling through relapse and sobriety week to week, this is not the right moment for this plan. Not because you don't deserve support, but because building something like this requires both people to show up with enough stability and honesty to mean it. A plan built in the wrong window will get abandoned the first time it's tested, and that failure will make it harder to reach for help the next time.

This plan is for people leaving treatment. For people in a sustained period of stability who are serious about what comes next. For people who have enough ground under them to sit across from someone they love and say: ***I am taking this seriously enough to plan for the worst.***

If that's you, keep reading.

What this is

A relapse is not the end of the story. It is a flaw in the design of the recovery, and like any flaw, it contains information. The only way a relapse becomes a true failure is if nothing is learned from it and no one shows up.

This plan exists so that the worst morning has a shape to it. So that when you wake up crushed by shame and regret, already drowning in "not again," you are not also trying to figure out who to call, what to say, or whether the person you call is going to make it worse. You already figured that out. Together. When both of you were clear-headed enough to do it well.

This is not a sponsor call, or it doesn't have to be. A sponsor responds in real time, from whatever headspace they're in that day, without preparation. This is different. The person on the other end already said yes, not just to being called, but to a specific role, a specific response, and a specific set of actions.

That agreement was made in advance, when neither of you were in crisis. Your sponsor can absolutely be that person. The point is that this is not a cold ask into the unknown.

Print this. Sit down together. Talk through it honestly. Fill in the blanks in each other's presence. Change what doesn't fit.

Sign it at the bottom.

Put it somewhere you can both find it.

Part One

For the person in recovery

To be filled in together, in your own words.

My early warning signs

The things that show up before things get bad. What do I look like when I'm heading somewhere dangerous? What do I stop doing? What do I start doing?

Be specific. Vague warning signs don't help anyone.

The person I am calling

Name, number, and the understanding that they have agreed to this role in advance. This is not a cold call. This person knows the plan.

Name _____ Number _____

What I need from them in the first couple hours

Not advice, not insight, not a conversation about why this happened. Just presence and a next step. Name it. Do I need them to come over? To sit with me? To drive me somewhere? To help me make calls?

My secondary support people

A sponsor, an addictions counsellor, a close friend, a family member — anyone who is supportive, reliable, and prepared for this call. The key word is **prepared**. Talk to each of these people before the crisis arrives. Tell them they are on this list. Tell them what you need from them if they get the call. List more than one. Not everyone answers on the first try.

1.

Name _____ Number _____ Role _____

2.

Name _____ Number _____ Role _____

3.

Name _____ Number _____ Role _____

Where I am going

Detox, a safe place, a friend's house, back into treatment. This is decided in advance, not in the moment. Name the place. Name the address if you can. The decision should already be made.

What I am giving my support person permission to do

Tick what applies. Add anything else that matters on the lines below.

- Help me pack
- Help me flush what's left
- Make calls on my behalf — to work, to a treatment program, to whoever needs to know
- Drive me where I need to go
- Stay with me until I am somewhere safe

What I am asking my support person *not* to do that day

You already know what makes it worse. Name it here so they don't have to guess.

Part Two

For the support person

This section is yours. It is not about managing them. It is about knowing your role so you don't have to figure it out from inside the worst moment.

When I get the call, my first response is

Not what I feel, but what I do. I show up. The feelings come later, in a safer window, with someone equipped to hold them.

What I agree to say

Keep it simple. Keep it present. "I'm on my way" covers most of it. "I'm not going anywhere" covers the rest.

What I agree *not* to say, no matter how much I want to

- Nothing that opens with "how could you"
- Nothing that references how much progress was lost
- Nothing about what this means for us — not today
- Nothing designed to make them feel the weight of what they've done. They already feel it. That is the whole problem.

Where my anger goes today

Your anger is valid. You have earned it. It does not belong in this conversation, not yet. Name in advance who you will call after they are safe — a friend, a therapist, your own support person — someone who can hold it with you while you hold them.

Name _____ Number _____

The things I am helping with today

- Showing up
- Driving
- Packing if needed
- Flushing if needed
- Making calls if needed — to work, to treatment, to whoever needs to know
- Sitting with them until they are somewhere safe

The things that are not my job today

- Figuring out why this happened
- Extracting promises
- Deciding what this means for the relationship
- Processing my own pain out loud in front of them

Those things are real and they matter. Today is not their day.

My line

Named clearly and in advance, not in the heat of the moment. What happens if this plan isn't followed? What are the consequences, and when do they get named? This is agreed on now, not improvised later.

The one rule that holds everything together

Nothing said in the first 24 hours that deepens the shame. Not because the shame isn't deserved. Not because there are no consequences coming. But because shame is the thing that makes people hide, and hiding is what turns a relapse into something longer and darker.

Get them somewhere safe first. Everything else has a time and a place. That time is not today.

A note on the first 48 hours

Once they are safe, once the immediate crisis has a shape to it, there is room to start asking simple questions. Not "why", not yet. The who, the what, the where. What happened in the days before. What the warning signs were. What got missed. **The facts.**

These details matter for a reason: people in addiction are experts at forgetting. Not always passively, sometimes the mind is working hard to not remember. Capturing the factual record while it's still fresh means it's there later, when the deeper work begins and memory becomes the thing standing between insight and another relapse.

The why comes later, with a counsellor, a therapist, someone equipped to help mine it for something useful. Trying to get to the why in the first 24 - 48 hours, while both people are raw and exhausted, produces heat and not much light.

A relapse is only a failure if the failure isn't identified. Give it the time and the conditions it needs to flip the relapse on its head and make the recovery stronger, not weaker.

Signed

We have read this together, filled it in together, and agreed to its terms.

Person in recovery

Signature _____ Date _____

Support person

Signature _____ Date _____

Secondary support / sponsor

Signature _____ Date _____