



Massachusetts Certified Peer Specialist Training Class

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is a Certified Peer Specialist

A Certified Peer Specialist (CPS) is a person who has been trained to effectively share his or her experiences in the mental health system and in recovery to carry the message that recovery is real. In sharing our experience, strength and hope with others, including people using services, mental health professionals and policy makers, CPSs can significantly impact peoples' beliefs about their own capacity to recover and the capacity of others to recover.

2. How does someone become a Certified Peer Specialist?

In Massachusetts, you can become a CPS when you take the CPS class and pass an exam.

3. How long does the class take?

From Orientation Day to Exam Day, the course is 13 weeks long. It is set up in a combination of day-long trainings and a 3 day retreat. The training begins with an orientation day, followed by the retreat, approximately 2 weeks later. Starting the week after the retreat, there are 6 individual training days that occur weekly on the same day of the week.

4. Do I have to stay somewhere overnight?

The retreat is a 3-day, 2-night event that includes staying at a retreat center overnight.

5. I feel uncomfortable sharing a room with a stranger. Is there anything I can do?

The orientation day is before the retreat, and there is a full day of class at the retreat before you share a room. By this time, people in the class are beginning to develop relationships with each other, which lessen the feeling of being with a "stranger."

However, if your difficulties stem from a physical or psychiatric condition, you may be entitled to the "reasonable accommodation" of a private room.

6. I need a "reasonable accommodation." How do I get this?

Some "reasonable accommodations" under the Americans with Disabilities Act are available for people with physical or psychiatric conditions. People have requested these for rooming needs at the retreat and for testing needs.

A reasonable accommodation must be requested in advance, and must be accompanied by a letter from your doctor certifying that you need the reasonable accommodation due to a physical or psychiatric condition.

If you request a private room as a reasonable accommodation, we will provide this for you. However, if providing this result in extra charges, you will be responsible for these charges. For example, if you get a private space in a double room and we are charged for the full room or a higher rate, we will expect you to pay the added charges. It is necessary for us to do this because of our very limited funding for the CPS training course. We make every effort to set up the rooms in such a way that there will be only minimal amounts passed on to you. We also encourage you to seek financial support from your employer, local RLC or Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission to cover any extra costs.

Accommodations available for exams include having time and one-half to complete the written part of the exam, the use of a scribe (due to hand or visual disabilities), etc. If you have any questions about reasonable accommodations, please call the CPS program staff at the Transformation Center at 617-442-4111.

7. What's happens on orientation day?

Orientation day is the first day of the course. It occurs after you've been accepted into the course, but is geared towards giving you the opportunity to experience a day of training before making your final decision to stay in the course.

8. How do I apply?

The applications and related materials are available on the Transformation Center website (www.transformation-center.org). A successful application includes: 1) The application; 2) two (2) references; and 3) a self-assessment (for your use). Applications and references must be received by the application due date.

9. Who teaches the course?

The CPS course is run by the Transformation Center and taught by CPS's. The Massachusetts CPS course is the only one in the country that is fully consumer run.

10. What's the exam like?

The exam, which takes place approximately 4 weeks after the last class, has a written and oral component. You have 3 hours to complete the written portion of the test, which is comprised of approximately 20 questions. The oral exam consists of verbally answering 5 questions in front of a panel of 3 people, and takes about ½ hour. The questions in both sections require you to demonstrate knowledge of the different tools, strategies and concepts discussed in classes, as well as the ability to apply this knowledge to specific situations.

11. Is there extra support to help me study?

The Transformation Center does not provide extra study support. However, students are encouraged to form study groups with their classmates. There are also many CPS's working in local RLC's who may be available to support students preparing for the exam.

12. I've heard you have to do homework. Is this true?

Yes. Most weeks there is an assignment. These are geared toward giving trainees experience with the material covered in class. Students also receive feedback on the assignments so they will know if they are understanding and learning the material.

13. I haven't gone to school in over 15 years. Can I pass this course?

Many CPS participants have not been in school for a while. We provide "study tips" at the beginning of the class to help students create a study plan for the course. Working with other students has been helpful to many participants, as well.

14. What things can help me feel more ready for the course?

Any activities that build a foundation in your personal recovery and in supporting others' recovery can be helpful. Involvement in a local RLC, participation in WRAP training, becoming a member of a peer support group, and reading about recovery can also support you.

15. What's the main purpose of the course?

The main purpose of the CPS course is to help build a peer workforce in Massachusetts. We bring our lived experience to the course; during the course, we learn how to use our story effectively to assist people receiving services as well as demonstrating recovery for service providers. We assist in proving that recovery is real as well as inspiring hope about recovery through sharing our stories.

16. Who funds the CPS program?

The Massachusetts Department of Mental Health funds the CPS program.

17. Who runs the CPS program?

The CPS program is run by the Transformation Center, a state-wide agency governed and staffed by people in recovery.

18. How do I know if I'm ready for the CPS course?

There is a self-assessment form on the Transformation Center website that can let you know how ready you are for the course. It also provides links to resources that can help you develop greater readiness for the CPS course.

19. How many people pass the test?

The passing rate varies greatly class to class, ranging from 50% to 89%. However people who are working in peer roles tend to pass the exam at far higher rates.

20. Do I have to become certified to get a peer job?

Not all peer jobs require Certification. Employers decide if they want peers to be certified. Often, a person will be hired before getting certified, with the expectation that the person will take the course and become certified within the first 6 months or year of employment. Some employers increase a person's salary when they receive their certification.

21. Is the CPS program a job-placement service

No. The CPS course only prepares you for the certification exam. You must do your own job searching. However, a CPS certification may help you be more marketable.

22. How do I find out about CPS jobs?

The Transformation Center's weekly newsletter, the Recovery Network News (RNN) posts CPS jobs that we are aware of. Some employers also use Craig's List to post employment opportunities.

23. How often is the CPS course offered?

The CPS class is usually offered four times per year, twice in the fall and twice in the spring.

24. How do I apply for the CPS course?

Application materials are available on the Transformation Center website, [www-transformation-center.org/training/cps](http://www.transformation-center.org/training/cps).

25. Where is the CPS course held?

Trainings are held in different locations across the state to make it easier for people to attend.

26. Where can I find more information about the CPS class.

On the Transformation Center website, www.transformation-center.org/training/cps