

Certified Peer Specialist Training Class

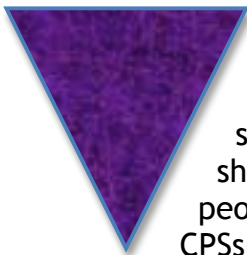
the
TRANSFORMATION
center



F.A.Q.s

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.

How does someone become a Certified Peer Specialist?

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

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 service providers. We assist in proving that recovery is real as well as inspiring hope about recovery through sharing our stories.

Who runs the CPS program?

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

Who teaches the course?

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

Who funds the CPS program?

The Massachusetts Department of Mental Health funds the CPS program.



How long does the class take?

From Orientation Day to Exam Day, the course is approximately 10 weeks long. It is set up in a combination of single-day trainings and a 3-day retreat. The course begins with an orientation day, followed by the retreat, approximately 2 weeks later. Starting the week after the retreat, there are 4 individual training days that occur weekly on the same day of the week. The exam is given approximately 4 weeks after the last class.

What 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. During the day, we spend time getting to know each other, go over the requirements for the course, and cover the beginning modules. While part of the day is somewhat informal, all students must attend.

Do I have to stay overnight at the Retreat?

Yes. The retreat is a 3-day, 2-night event that does include staying at the retreat center overnight.

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 lessens the feeling of being with a "stranger."

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

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 stating that you need the specific accommodations due to your physical or psychiatric condition.

If you request a private room as a reasonable accommodation, we will provide this for you. However, if providing this results 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.

How do I apply?

The application process includes a written application, references, and attending an interview. The interview is done at an Interview Meeting. When the dates are posted, you should e-mail us cps@transformation-center.org and sign up for one of the dates (usually 3-hour sessions offered during the week and on the weekend).

You should bring your completed application to the Interview Meeting. The application, self-assessment and related materials are available on the Transformation Center website (www.transformation-center.org/training/cps).

Part of completing the application includes filling out the self-assessment. You don't need to pass in the self-assessment - this is for your information- but there is a question on the application that asks about your experience with the self-assessment.

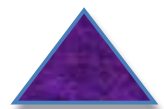
The application process also includes submitting two (2) references from people that you've known for more than a year. A family member cannot complete the reference, but a friend, colleague, peer coach, therapist, etc. can fill this out. This gets mailed by the person completing it directly to the Transformation Center. But it's your responsibility to follow-up and make sure that it gets in by the due date.

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. 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.

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 CPSs working in local RLCs who may be available to support students preparing for the exam.



Do you have to be at every class?

Yes and No. To be eligible to sit for the exam, you have to attend all but three (3) sessions of the class. We do this to stay in step with National Certification Standards.

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

Yes. Most weeks there is an assignment. These are geared toward giving students 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.

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 students.

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 a WRAP training, becoming a member of a peer support group, and reading about recovery can also support you.

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, as well as recommendations for developing a stronger foundation for a later class.

How many people pass the test?

The passing rate varies greatly class to class. However, people have three different opportunities to take the same exam. We understand that part of the work people do may include learning how to study, how to approach taking an exam, and finding additional strategies for handling test anxiety. Having three opportunities give people time and support to continue learning these different skills, and many people who do not pass the exam the first time do go on to pass on the second or third try.

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 become Certified. But it's not a requirement at this point in time.

