



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 8 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, and includes class days and retreat. The retreat provides an excellent opportunity to network and form lasting relationships with your classmates. The exam is given approximately 2 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.

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.
- 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 refer to the CPS Program Policy Manual available on our website.

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 request an interview.
- You should bring your completed application to the Interview Meeting. The application, self-assessment and related materials are posted on the Transformation Center website (www.transformation-center.org/training/cps).
- Filling out the self-assessment can be used to evaluate your readiness for this training. You don't need to pass in the self-assessment – this is for your information and will help you prepare for the interview.
- The application process also includes obtaining two (2) letters of reference 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. One reference must be from someone involved in peer support. The reference letters should be brought to your interview.

What's the exam like?

There is a written certification exam, which takes place approximately 2 weeks after the last class. You have 3 hours to complete the test. The questions 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. There is a combination on True/False, multiple choice, and open response questions.

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 cannot miss more than three class periods. We do this to stay in step with National Certification Standards.

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

Yes. Every week there are assignments. 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 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. Tutoring is available for those who do not pass the first time.

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.