



TRAINING PROGRAM



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

▶ WHAT IS A CERTIFIED PEER SPECIALIST?

A Certified Peer Specialist (CPS) is a trained professional who shares their lived experience of mental health recovery, resilience and healing as a means to inspire hope, optimism and the courage to act. A CPS supports people to strengthen their own unique pathway in life in settings that include inpatient, emergency services, respite, community health and outreach services, prevention and Recovery Learning Communities (RLCs). By sharing their experience, strength and hope with people using services, mental health professionals, policy makers and others, CPSs can significantly impact peoples' beliefs about the capacity for all people to recover.



▶ HOW DOES SOMEONE BECOME A CERTIFIED PEER SPECIALIST?

In Massachusetts, you become a Certified Peer Specialist when you complete the CPS training and pass the Certification exam.

▶ WHAT'S THE PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM?

The primary purpose of the CPS program is to help build a peer support workforce in Massachusetts. The training is designed to enhance the tools used by people who already have experience in peer support and the mental health recovery movement. Students bring their lived experience to class and learn how to use their story and skills to assist people receiving services as well as service providers. CPSs are the evidence that recovery is real.

▶ WHO RUNS THE CPS PROGRAM?

The CPS program is run by Kiva Centers under parent organization The Transformation Center, a statewide non-profit organization governed and staffed by people in recovery. The CPS Oversight Board is responsible for advising the CPS Training Program Coordinator regarding all aspects of the program, including curriculum, training and testing processes, policy and procedures, program evaluation, and meeting the needs of the community.

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▶ WHO TEACHES THE CPS TRAINING?

The CPS training is run by The Transformation Center and taught primarily by CPSs. The Massachusetts CPS program is the only one in the country that is fully run by people with lived experience.

▶ WHO FUNDS THE CPS PROGRAM?

The Massachusetts Department of Mental Health has funded the CPS program since it began. Commonwealth Corporation and others also contribute funds to run the CPS program.



▶ WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO APPLY FOR THE CPS TRAINING?

Applicants to the CPS Training Program need to:

- ◆ Have lived experience of a mental health condition or emotional distress or trauma resulting in significant life disruption
- ◆ Be willing to share aspects of that experience as part of their work as a CPS.
- ◆ Be 18 years old or older
- ◆ Have a High School Diploma or equivalent (GED, HiSET, etc.)
- ◆ Live or work in Massachusetts

▶ HOW LONG DOES THE PROGRAM TAKE?

From Orientation Day to Exam Day, the program can take from four to ten weeks depending how often the class meets. The exam is given approximately two weeks after the last class.



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▶ HOW DO I APPLY? WHAT ABOUT THE INTERVIEW?

The application process includes an application, references, and a brief in-person interview. All the materials and information you need can be found on the CPS page of Kiva Center's website <https://kivacenters.org/certified-peer-specialist/> or can be sent to you after scheduling an interview. Your ability to follow these instructions is part of our evaluation of readiness for the CPS training.

Summary of the application process and interview steps:

1. Review "CPS Training Eligibility" and other information on the website
2. Assess your readiness for CPS Training using the "CPS Training Self-assessment"
3. Click 'Apply Here' on our website and fill out a 30–40-minute application
4. After filling out an application, check your email for confirmation and a link to schedule your CPS Interview. Click the link and schedule a date and time for the interview.
5. After filling out an interview date and time, check your email for confirmation. Please forward the confirmation email to two references.
6. As your references complete the reference form (a link in the body of the Interview confirmation form), you will receive a confirmation email that we have received a reference on your behalf.

Filling out the self-assessment can help you evaluate your readiness for this training. You don't need to submit the self-assessment; it 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 have known you for more than a year. A friend, colleague, peer support coach, therapist, etc. can complete a reference. Letters will not be accepted from family members. One reference must be from someone involved in peer support. The reference letters should be uploaded to the CPS Portal or brought to your interview.



▶ DO I HAVE TO BE AT EVERY CLASS?

Each class includes three (3) different modules. Each module is important for your workforce development and preparation for the exam. Being late or completely missing four or more modules will disqualify you from completing the course and taking the exam. We do this to ensure we stay in compliance with National Certification Standards.

▶ I'VE HEARD YOU HAVE TO DO HOMEWORK. IS THIS TRUE?

Yes. Every class includes assignments. These are designed to give students experience with the material covered in class. Turning in homework will contribute to your overall class participation grade.

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▶ 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. Students have requested reasonable accommodations for both rooming needs and for testing needs.



A reasonable accommodation must be requested in advance, and some must be accompanied by a letter from your doctor. Contact the CPS Director for more specifics. Accommodations available for exams include having time-and-a-half (150% of the time limit) 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 contact the CPS Program Director at 508-466-7154 or email to CPS@kivacenters.org.

▶ HOW DO I KNOW IF IM READY FOR THE CPS TRAINING?

There is a self-assessment form on The Transformation Center website that can help you determine how ready you are for the program. It includes recommendations for developing a strong foundation in peer support.

▶ WHAT THINGS CAN HELP ME FEEL MORE READY FOR THE TRAINING?

Any activities that build a foundation in your personal recovery and in supporting others in their 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 your readiness.

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▶ WHAT'S THE EXAM LIKE?

The passing rate varies class-to-class averaging around 85% - 97% and people have three opportunities to take the same exam. We understand that part of the work people do includes learning how to study, how to approach taking an exam, and finding additional strategies for handling test anxiety. 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 their first exam.



▶ DO I HAVE TO BECOME CERTIFIED TO GET A PEER SUPPORT JOB?

Not all peer jobs require certification but some funding sources do require peer support to be provided by a CPS. Employers decide if they will require peer support workers to be certified. Often, a person will be hired before getting certified, with the expectation that the person will take the training and become certified within the first 6 months or first year of employment. Some employers increase a person's salary when they complete the CPS training and certification program.

