



Youth Certified Peer Specialist FAQs

What is a Youth Certified Peer Specialist?

Youth Certified Peer Specialist (CPS-Y) – An individual who is a young adult, age 18 through 26, with experience living with a mental health or substance use condition or both, who has received behavioral health services as a youth, is willing and able to self-identify as a person living with a behavioral health condition and is prepared to use that experience in helping other youth/young adults living with similar behavioral health conditions.

The CPS-Y offers emotional support, shares knowledge, works with individuals to identify tools of wellness/resiliency/recovery available for everyday life, provides practical assistance, and connects people with resources, opportunities and communities of support.

Can I get certified if I am not living with a mental health or substance use condition?

No. The *personal experience of living* with a mental health or substance use condition is what makes this certification and service unique.

Can I get certified as a Youth CPS if I'm over the age of 26?

No. CPS-Y applicants must be between the ages of 18-26.

What are the required qualifications?

- Be 18-26 years of age (valid Georgia ID); and
- Have a mental health (MH) condition, substance use disorder (SUD), or a co-occurring diagnosis; and a strong desire to identify themselves as a person living with a mental illness or substance use diagnosis; and
- Be able/willing to actively seek and manage your own appropriate care; and
- Be able to share their own personal story in a safe and appropriate way;
- Must be well grounded in recovery wellness
- One year between diagnosis and application to training
- If the individual has a substance use condition, there must be one year continuous abstinent from substance use
- Have a high school diploma or GED; provide a copy of these documents;
- Provide (2) letters of reference.

Do I have to be free from symptoms?

No. We understand that recovery from mental health and substance use can be a journey and everyone is different. Applicants must have a year or more of continuous abstinence from substance use and must have a wellness plan for themselves. In addition, candidates must be able to seek and manage their own care.

Will the training teach me about the different diagnoses?

No. The Youth CPS training teaches participants to skillfully and strategically use their lived experience with living with a mental health, substance use or co-occurring health condition to help others. Youth CPSs are **not** counselors, caseworkers or clinicians.

How much does it cost?

There is no cost to candidates who are accepted into the training. However, candidates are responsible for their own travel expenses.

How long is the training?

The Youth Certified Peer Specialist training is 5 consecutive days.

Do I have to take a test to get certified?

Yes. Every candidate is required to take and pass a test to get certified.

Does going through the training guarantee me a job?

No. Receiving the Youth Peer Specialist certification does not guarantee a job. Individuals are required to seek employment independently.

Will I be drug tested?

No. We do not drug test for the training. However, most employers require a criminal background and random drug testing.

CHECKLIST:

How can I determine if I'm ready to participate in the Youth Peer Specialist training?

- A peer specialist must be living in recovery and, able to publicly describe and model to others the things that they learned that helped them to wellness.
- You can advocate for yourself.
- Have you been abstinent from substance use for over a year?
- Have you been consistent with making your mental health your priority for over a year?
- Are you willing to disclose to individuals receiving services, staff and the general public that you have been diagnosed with a mental illness and/or addiction disorder?
- Can you describe what you have had to overcome to get where you are today?
- Can you describe what you have learned about yourself and what we call recovery? Can you describe some of the strengths you have developed?
- Can you describe some of the things that you do daily to keep yourself on the path of recovery?
- Can you describe what your diagnosis means, how it impacted your life and what things you did to change that?
- Can you describe the purpose of your medications, any side affects you experienced and plans you developed to deal with them? (If you do not take medication leave blank)
- Do you have any type of written wellness plan? Can you describe what it was like to put one together and how it has helped you?
- Can you describe some of the beliefs and values you have or have developed that helps to strengthen your recovery and why do you believe they do?
- Do you believe that you could talk to a person to help them understand that recovery is possible?
- Can you describe the role that a sense of hope and resiliency played in your life, your recovery?
- Can you describe some of the community supports you have and how they help you in your recovery?
- Can you describe how you deal with crisis? With recurrence of your symptoms? With setbacks (relapse)?
- You may hear recovery stories of others in the training. Sometimes these stories may be uncomfortable for you, particularly if they touch upon one of your “triggers or traumatic experiences”. Are you okay with this?

If you answered YES to (10) or more questions, you may be ready to participate in the peer specialist training at this time.

What type of place might I work at once I become a CPS-Y?

Opportunities for employment may be available at any of the Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities DBHDD, Child & Adolescent provider organizations i.e. Community Service Boards (CSB), Family Support Organizations (FSO)

How do I apply for the Youth CPS Training?

Contact Dana McCrary, Parent & Youth Peer Specialist Coordinator, at cpsparent.youth@dbhdd.ga.gov