



Introduction

Hello there! Recovery Ways of Idaho is happy to welcome you to this Certified Peer Support Specialist (CPSS) Training Guide. Peer support is an exciting field to get into and we want to make sure that it is a good fit for you. A CPSS is someone who lives with mental illness or mental illness and co-occurring substance abuse disorder who helps people who have had similar experiences advance in their recovery. CPSSs share their lived experience with mental illness/co-occurring substance use in order to connect with peers and help them see they are not alone; helping them to share their own stories, set goals, build hope, and live more self-directed, purpose-filled lives. It is rooted in the belief that recovery is possible for anyone. Of course, as with any job, it has its difficult parts and challenges that might not be for everyone. This guide is intended to give you insight into what peer support is, what is involved with the training, and things to contemplate before applying for the training.

Peer Support Explained

CPSSs share their experiences with being successful in recovery to inspire hope and encouragement in peers navigating similar situations. Through shared understanding, respect, and mutual empowerment, CPSSs help peers become and stay engaged in the recovery process and reduce the likelihood of relapse. Peer support services can effectively extend the reach of treatment beyond the clinical setting into the everyday environment of those seeking a successful, sustained recovery process.

Peer support is not like traditional mental health services, nor is it just about being friends. Unlike therapy or case management, peer support helps people understand each other because they've *"been there,"* shared similar experiences and can model for each other a willingness to learn and grow. In peer support, people come together with the intention of changing unhelpful patterns, getting out of "stuck" places, and building relationships that are respectful, mutually responsible, and potentially mutually transforming.

In other words, people come to a peer support program because it feels safe and accepting. By sharing experiences and building trust, peers help each other move beyond their perceived limitations, old patterns, and ways of thinking about mental health. This allows members of the

peer community to try out new ways of doing things and move beyond the “illness culture” into a culture of health and ability.

What do Certified Peer Support Specialists do?

CPSSs can play many roles in support of people living with psychiatric disorders and in addiction recovery. They provide compassionate listening, and a positive vision of the future.

Additionally, they can work with individuals in goal setting, and developing achievable action plans.

They can play an important role in supporting people in self-managing and working towards whole health goals. They are uniquely qualified to assist peers in connecting with their communities, building supportive relationships, accessing formal and informal resources, and working with cultural humility to support people across a wide range of cultural differences.

The relationship between the CPSS and the peer is the foundation on which peer support is built; the relationship is respectful, trusting, empathetic, collaborative, and mutual.

The CPSS role does not include treatment, assessment or evaluation and is explicitly a non-clinical one. CPSSs act as educators and advocates, promoting the program values of authenticity, self-determination, diversity, and inclusion.

Peer support workers engage in a wide range of activities. These can include:

- Advocating for people in recovery
- Sharing resources and building skills
- Building community and relationships
- Leading recovery groups
- Skill building, mentoring, and setting goals
- Connecting to resources
- Experiential sharing
- Information gathering and verification
- Role-modeling and more

What Skills does a CPSS need?

CPSSs are expected to have the following skills:

Communication

- Uses strengths-oriented, respectful language in interpersonal interactions with peers, their families, and colleagues as well as in the documentation of the peer support specialist’s work.
- Recognizes when to ask questions or share personal experiences and when to listen.

- Communicates in a timely manner with other members of a peer's treatment team and shares all relevant information needed to assist with his/her goals and current needs.
- Asks open-ended questions that allow more information to be shared and can allow an individual to discover his/her own inner wisdom.
- Practices patience, kindness, warmth, and dignity with everyone that the CPSS interacts with in their work.
- Listens to others with careful attention to the content and emotion being communicated.
- Demonstrates understanding and validates others' experiences and feelings.

Teamwork

- Develops collaborative relationships with peers as part of a treatment team to assist peers' engagement with services that are valuable to their recovery.
- Shares knowledge, ideas, and resources with team members in a cooperative and collaborative manner.
- Strives to fulfill their role and responsibility within the team while respecting the roles and responsibilities of the other team members.

Critical Thinking

- Engages in active listening skills to better understand a situation and recognizes that there is more than one way to look at an issue.
- Considers the possible implications or outcomes of their actions and, when asked, will help peers to explore the outcome or possible consequences of various options.
- Demonstrates good judgement in respecting the limits and boundaries of their role.

Hope

- Operates from a sense of hope expressing confidence that others will be successful in their own personal journeys of recovery.
- Strives to model realistic optimism and a belief that even in difficult situations positive choices can be made.

Flexibility and Adaptability

- Is open to new ideas, deals comfortably with ambiguity, and adjusts plans or behaviors to better suit a given situation.
- Is willing to be open-minded and compromises when needed.

Managing Crisis and Emergency Situations

- Provides reassurance and support to peers in distress and works collaboratively with coworkers to connect peers with the appropriate people and/or services.

Initiative and Commitment

- Is dependable and carries tasks through to completion.
- Demonstrates good judgement knowing when insight or assistance should be requested from another and are trustworthy when working independently.

Workplace Skills

- Actively participates in Supervision.
- Proficient in the use of technology and demonstrates effective professionalism in communication through the use of technology, such as email, phone, etc.

Continuous Learning and Development

- Strives to approach life and work in a curious manner, identifies areas where personal growth may be helpful, and takes advantage of opportunities to learn and develop.
- Recognizes the value of on-going personal growth and skill development and maintains a connection with a peer support community as a resource to stay 'grounded' in the work of authentic peer support.

Cultural Competence

- Shows understanding of how socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender, spirituality, sexual orientation, military background, and other subcultural influences can impact a person's approach to recovery, belief systems, and interpersonal interactions.
- Can demonstrate how peer support specialists own personal values and culture and how they may contribute to beliefs, judgment, and biases in how to approach their work.
- Demonstrates capability in interacting thoughtfully and successfully with people from various cultural backgrounds.

Self-Awareness and Confidence

- Interacts in a manner that demonstrates a balance of self-confidence with openness to the thoughts and opinions of others.
- Self-reflects and understands that personal thoughts and attitudes can influence their behavior and actions.

Self-Management and Resiliency

- Understands the importance of self-care and stress management and models the practices that work best for them to remain healthy while supporting others.
- Strives to maintain calm and diffuse stressful or challenging situations.

(Adapted from "Introduction to Effective Communication Skills for a Peer Support Specialist in VHA, Mark Parker and "Peer Support Competencies, Peer Support Canada)

What is "Recovery?"

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) define Recovery as “A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential.”

Recovery is ignited by hope. Hope is the belief that one has both the ability and the opportunity to engage in the recovery process. “The belief that recovery is real provides the essential and motivating message of a better future – that people can and do overcome the internal and external challenges, barriers, and obstacles that confront them. Hope is internalized and can be fostered by peers, families, providers, allies, and others. Hope is the catalyst of the recovery process,” SAMHSA.

In order to be eligible for training, you must be able to demonstrate that you have had at least one year of ongoing, uninterrupted recovery in mental health or cooccurring substance use recovery.

What is covered in the training?

At Recovery Ways of Idaho, Peer Support Specialist Training is designed to give you the skills to support and empower resilience in those individuals who may be at any stage in their recovery process from mental illness or co-occurring addiction.

Recovery Ways of Idaho’s training is comprehensive and covers concepts specific to peer support, while weaving in elements applicable to performing peer support in Idaho. It is geared for folks who are well rooted in their own recovery, who understand the importance of self-care, and who are motivated and eager to work as a CPSS. The training is very interactive. Trainees can expect lots of group discussion and activities, role playing, reading aloud, practicing peer support with a partner, and lots of discussion. The training has a maximum of 10 people, it lasts 40 hours, and is led by a CPSS in recovery for mental health. The curriculum includes:

- What is Peer Support
- The Language of Recovery
- The Recovery process and the Stages Model
- Using Your Recovery Story as a Recovery Tool
- Building Peer Support Relationships
- The Strengths Model
- Trauma Informed Care
- Ethics
- Effective Listening and the Art of Asking Questions
- Wellness
- Self-care
- Interpersonal and Professional Communication
- Natural Supports
- Risk and Protective Factors
- Family Dynamics
- Recovery Values
- CPSS Roles and Duties
- Workplace Dynamics and Processes
- The State of the Behavioral Health System
- Cultural Competence
- Advocacy for Recovery Programs
- Local and National Resources
- Boundaries

Training Eligibility Requirements

In order to be considered for the training, applicants must complete the application in full, meet all eligibility requirements, and submit their application and letters of reference. Applying does not guarantee a spot in the training. There may be a larger number of applications than the number of training seats available: The eligibility requirements, application process, and phone interviews are used to determine the most qualified applicants. Qualified applicants who are not accepted into the training because it is full will be given instructions about how to get on the waitlist for the next available training.

You must have personal lived experience with mental health or co-occurring substance use to be eligible for this training. Individuals who have experienced addiction but do not identify as having a mental illness are prohibited from training. Individuals who are not well rooted in their recovery (which is demonstrated in your application answers and your phone interview) are prohibited from this training.

To be eligible for Peer Support Specialist training in Idaho, you must meet all the following conditions:

1. Be at least 18 years of age.
2. Identify as a person in recovery from a mental illness or mental illness and co-occurring addiction.
3. Have at least one continuous year in recovery.
4. Be able to provide 2 Letters of Reference from individuals who have been involved in your mental health recovery process.
5. Have a high school diploma, GED or higher education and can provide documentation of your education during the certification process.
6. Be able to pass a background check for employment as a CPSS.
7. Be willing to share your experience with mental health illness and recovery with peers and coworkers.
8. Have a desire to assist others with their own recovery.
9. Feel comfortable with reading, writing, and using a computer.
10. Be able to attend and actively participate in a 40-hour training over the course of a week.
11. Have reliable transportation for attending work and visiting peers in their homes or out in the community.
12. Read, understand, and agree to abide by the Idaho Certified Peer Support Specialist Ethics and code of conduct.

Background checks

You will be required to pass a background check in order to work with vulnerable adults in Idaho. It is your responsibility to confirm whether or not you can pass a criminal background check before you apply for training. It is not required to take the training, but it will most likely be required to gain employment. Please visit <https://chu.dhw.idaho.gov> and contact the Criminal History Unit at 208-332-7990 or crimhist@dhw.idaho.gov if you have questions regarding your ability to pass a background check.

Application Process

The application process includes:

- Submitting an electronic application two Letters of Reference from people who have been witness to and involved with your recovery
- A 30–45-minute phone interview
- Reference checking

Applicants must complete the application in full, meet all eligibility requirements and submit their Letters of Reference in order to be considered for the training. There could be more applicants than spaces in the training. The application responses, Letters of Reference, and interview are used to screen for qualified applicants. If there are more qualified candidates that room in the training, they will be added to a waitlist for the next available training. You must submit all the elements of the application before you can be considered for the waitlist.

Letters of Reference

A Letter of Reference for our purposes is a letter written by an individual that has been involved in your mental health recovery process. The letter can be submitted by you, the applicant, or your reference at our website <https://www.idahobehavior.com/training>. The letter must include:

1. The references' relationship to you.
2. How they have been part of your mental health/addiction recovery process.
3. Why they believe you are qualified to professionally support others in their recovery process, giving specific reasons that demonstrate the applicant is well-rooted in their recovery and able to help others.

The letters must be typed and written and signed by someone who has been a part of your recovery. They can be from a current or former counselor, Peer Support Specialist, Community Based Rehabilitation Specialist or Case Manager, an employer, clergy, teacher, friend or family member or anyone who has been witness to and can speak about your recovery. The letters can be submitted on our website at <https://www.idahobehavior.com/training> by you or by the person writing the letter. It is ideal to submit your reference letters at the same time as you submit your application. They must be submitted before your phone interview.

Phone Interviews

The phone interview is a chance for our staff to chat with you and for you to get a better feel of what to expect from training. You will probably have lots of questions and this is the time to ask everything you need to know to see if this is a good fit for you. A staff member will call to arrange a phone interview. Please mark this date and time on your calendar. The interview is conducted by the trainer who is a CPSS and Certified Youth Support Specialist. It is roughly 30-45 minutes long.

Selection Criteria

Applications will be evaluated in chronological order. If the number of applicants exceeds the number of seats available in the training, preference will be given to those who demonstrate through their application, references, and interview that they are well rooted in the recovery process, and that they have a strong desire to become a peer support specialist.

Class Participation and Demonstrated Strength in Recovery

Class participation is a very important part of the learning process in this course. Although not explicitly graded, you will be evaluated on the QUALITY of your contributions and insights, as well as your ability to demonstrate your strength and understanding of the recovery process. As part of determining whether a student is qualified to become a peer support specialist, class instructors evaluate each student's understanding of recovery and how well they are rooted in their recovery. Students who do not demonstrate strength and understanding of the recovery process will be prohibited from applying for certification. The trainee will be notified by the instructor that they do not yet meet the minimum standard outlined above. They will receive a letter describing the reasons they are prohibited from applying for certification and will be provided advice concerning which areas to improve. The trainee may be eligible to retake the training again in one year -- each unique case will be evaluated to determine eligibility. Should the trainee be invited back, they will need to provide an application, new references, and attend another interview. Refunds will not be given to those who are prohibited from certification based off the instructor's evaluation. Capabilities that are evaluated for each trainee are as follows:

- Participates actively in class, is fully present and engaged
- Is comfortable asking for help and open to helping others
- Works well independently, as well as in a group, or with a partner
- Successfully shares parts of their recovery story when appropriate
- Is respectful to the instructor and the class
- Maintains 100% attendance throughout the class and is punctual
- Communicates successfully utilizing professional and interpersonal communication skills
- Works well in a group, is good at taking turns and letting others speak
- Fully comprehends the recovery process
- Takes advantage of the trainer and training materials by asking questions, effectively utilizing training manual and asking for help when needed
- Shows the ability to relate authentically with others and develop new relationships
- Demonstrates mastery of self-care through action and insight
- Maintains a positive attitude and demonstrates self-awareness
- Is open to constructive feedback from instructors and classmates
- Demonstrates that they are well rooted in their recovery

Training Exam

After you have attended 100% of the training session, demonstrate strength in recovery, competency in the areas above and understanding of the training material, you will be eligible to take the comprehension exam on the last day of training. Passing is considered with a score of 80% or greater. If trainee does not pass, he/she must retake the exam within 4 weeks of training completion. If a trainee fails to take the exam in the 4-week period, they must retake

the training course in order to retake the exam. Recovery Ways of Idaho trainers will provide a document of course completion, along with passing test results; trainees are then eligible to apply for Idaho peer support specialist certification (instruction provided).

BHA Health is the governing body that provides certification for Idaho peer support specialists. Once all conditions of training have been met, you can use [this link](#) to apply for certification.

Training Fee

The training fee is \$400. You can pay with a debit or credit card at our website at <https://www.idahobehavior.com/training> or you can mail a check or drop one off at Recovery Ways of Idaho at 1811 Karcher Rd, Nampa, ID 83686. This is also where the training will be held.

The training fee covers the cost of training materials but doesn't include travel, accommodations, or lunch. If you are currently employed and need to make accommodations to attend training, please do so *before applying*. If you need to arrange for childcare or pet care, please do so in advance of training. You will not be allowed to leave training early. You must attend 100% of the training to be eligible to take the test. Refunds will not be given for individuals who have to miss any portion of time from the training for any circumstance.

Cancellation policy

Applicants may cancel up to the day before training is scheduled to start. There is no canceling once the class begins for any reason. A student may withdraw from training, but no refund will be issued. Students who withdraw are eligible to take the class again at a discounted rate of 75% of the course fee for up to one year from the date of withdrawal. Students must re-apply with a new application, new references, and sit for a 30–45-minute interview. Readmittance is not guaranteed and is entirely at the discretion of Recovery Ways of Idaho.

Refund policy

The course fee is \$400 and is due a week before training starts. Applicants may request a refund until the day before training. No refunds will be issued once training begins for any reason. Refunds will not be issued if a trainee is dismissed for disciplinary reasons or attendance issues.

CPSS Certification Process

Each student who passes the exam and is eligible to apply to become certified as a CPSS must apply through BPA Health, the certifying body for Idaho's peer support specialists. Information about the certification process can be found at <https://www.bpahealth.com/peer-family-support-certification-application/>

1. You must successfully complete Peer Support Training before applying for certification.
2. Once you have completed training, you are eligible to apply for peer support certification through [BPA Health using the application for 6-month CPSS certification](#).

3. You will receive your 6-month certification from the Peer and Family Support Certification Committee once your application is approved. It is valid for 6 months. The Certification Committee has up to 30 days to review and approve your application, meaning you may have to wait up to 1 month to provide peer support after completing your application for certification. You can use this time to look for employment, go on job interviews, and even do orientation or on-the-job training if your agency offers it. You cannot bill for peer support services until after you have received proof of certification from BPA Health.
4. After receiving your 6-month certification, you will be a Certified Peer Support Specialist. The next 6 months will be spent accumulating hours for your next certification. You must accrue 100 hours of work experience if you hold a bachelor's degree or higher in a human services field or 200 hours of work experience if you have a high school diploma or GED but do not have a bachelor's degree or higher in a human services field. You must also receive 20 hours of supervision by a degreed professional in a human services field who holds supervisory capacity at their organization. It's important to understand that you can bill for your services during this time as long as you have your 6-month certification. You can apply for an extension of time if you need more than 6 months to accrue your 20 hours of supervision and 100-200 hours of work experience if needed.
5. Once you complete your 100-200 hours of work experience and 20 hours of supervision, your supervisor will need to submit your hours using the Supervision and Work Experience Verification Form [which you can access here](#). If you work at more than one employer, more than one form can be submitted.
6. Once the Certification Committee approves your hours of supervision and work experience, you will be granted a full 1-year CPSS certification.
7. You must complete 10 hours of continuing education annually to maintain your certification. One hour must be in ethics.
8. You will submit your 10 continuing education certificates when you apply for annual certification renewal by submitting them with the Certification Renewal Application. You can [apply here](#). It is your responsibility to renew your certification each year before it expires.

How to Prepare

You will be required to attend all of training Monday-Friday 9am-5pm. You cannot miss any portion of training. You will receive the training manual on the first day of training and will need to bring it with you every day. It is recommended that you bring paper and something to write with in order to take notes, as well as a highlighter and flash cards. You may bring your cell phone, but it must be placed on silent, and all distractions minimized.

What to Expect During Training

The training is fun and very interactive! You should expect to share your recovery story, participate in interactive breakout groups and role play. You can expect to get emotional support from the trainer. There are frequent breaks, stress relief activities and opportunities to center yourself. You will be expected to be focused, alert, and ready to participate throughout the training.

You will be expected to keep what is shared in the training confidential. Please do not share what you hear in training with people outside of it.

Portions of the training can be rather taxing as you are sharing intimate, personal information about yourself and hearing other people's recovery stories. Some of the information shared could be triggering. It's suggested that you rest well, eat well, and *practice good self-care* during the entire course of the training. You should come prepared with tools to help you manage any stress or triggers that may arise while participating in the training.

Billable Hours

It's important to note before deciding to become a CPSS that CPSSs are typically paid by the billable hour. Meaning they get paid by the time they are working face-to-face with peers. This means that your income will fluctuate due to late or cancelled appointments. There are activities outside of what is considered a billable hour that CPSSs must do, such as driving to and from appointments, making phone calls, sending emails, documenting your appointments, attending supervision, staff meetings, etc. The rate of pay for these activities are typically lower and varies from one employer to the next. It is wise while going on job interviews to ask your prospective employers how they pay for non-billable hour activities.

Idaho CPSS Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct

Peer Support is a helping relationship between mental health client and Certified Peer Support Specialist. The primary responsibility of Certified Peer Support Specialist is to help those they serve achieve self-directed recovery. They believe that every individual has strengths and the ability to learn and grow. As such, Certified Peer Support Specialist are committed to providing and advocating for effective recovery-based services for the people they serve in order for them to meet their own needs, desires and goals.

1. Certified Peer Support Specialist seek to role-model recovery.
2. Certified Peer Support Specialist respect the rights and dignity of those they serve.
3. Certified Peer Support Specialist respect the privacy and confidentiality of those they serve.
4. Certified Peer Support Specialist openly share their personal recovery stories with colleagues and those they serve.

5. Certified Peer Support Specialist maintain high standards of personal conduct and conduct themselves in a manner that fosters their own recovery.
6. Certified Peer Support Specialist never intimidate, threaten, or harass those they serve; never use undue influence, physical force, or verbal abuse with those they serve; and never make unwarranted promises of benefit to those they serve.
7. Certified Peer Support Specialist do not practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate with any form of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, marital status, political belief, or mental or physical disability.
8. Certified Peer Support Specialist never engage in sexual/intimate activities with their colleagues or those they serve.
9. Certified Peer Support Specialist do not accept gifts of significant value from those they serve.
10. Certified Peer Support Specialist do not enter into dual relationships or commitments that conflict with the interest of those they serve.
11. Certified Peer Support Specialist do not abuse substances under any circumstances while they are employed as a Certified Peer Support Specialist.
12. Certified Peer Support Specialist work to equalize the power differentials that may occur in the peer support/client relationships.
13. Certified Peer Support Specialist ensure that all information and documentation provided is true and accurate to the best of their knowledge.
14. Certified Peer Support Specialist keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to recovery, and openly share the best of their knowledge.
15. Certified Peer Support Specialist remain aware of their skills and limitations, and do not provide services or represent themselves as expert in area for which they do not have sufficient knowledge or expertise.
16. Certified Peer Support Specialist do not hold a clinical role and do not offer primary treatment for mental health issues, prescribe medicine, act as a legal representative, or provide legal advice, counseling, therapy, social work, drug testing, or diagnosis of symptoms and disorders.

Certified Peer Support Specialist must complete ethics training approved by the certifying body at least once per year and maintain personal documentation of completed ethics training. Certified Peer Support Specialist must understand and adhere to Idaho Certified Peer Support Specialist Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. A code of Ethics violation is the failure to do so.

Individuals who have violated the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct will follow the process for corrective action put forth by the certifying body approved by the Idaho Division of Behavioral Health.

Thank you!

Thank you for reading the Training Readiness Guide. You may now fill out and submit your application, as well as submit your Letters of Reference, at <https://www.idahobehavior.com/training>. We look forward to receiving your application. Please let us know if you have any questions.

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