

# NATIONAL FAMILY PEER CERTIFICATION

*Bringing Lived Experience to Family Peer Support*



## Information Packet



# The Value of National Family Peer Specialist Certification



**National certification enhances alignment  
in the family peer workforce!**



**Uniformity of Core  
Knowledge**



**Aligned Standards and  
Scope of Practice**



**Continuing Professional  
Development and  
Credibility Ensured**



**Ethical Practices  
Promoted**

## Benefits for the Family Peer Specialists

National certification indicates professional readiness.

**01**

Reliable Examination  
Demonstrates Mastery of  
Core Competencies that  
Prepares FPS for Career

**02**

Professional Recognition  
and Acceptance

**03**

Increased Job  
Opportunities



Visit [www.ffcmh.org/certification](http://www.ffcmh.org/certification) to learn more.

# Why Family Peer Specialists Are Essential



Family Peer Specialists (FPS) are parents, family members, or caregivers who have or had responsibility parenting a child across the lifespan or as a primary caregiver for another family member experiencing mental health and/or substance use challenges. They can speak about and use their **lived experience** to support other families to advocate for their child's or family member's well-being, supporting them in navigating systems, and offering other necessary resources.

## Peer Support

FPS have the unique ability to connect with family members to:

- reduce isolation
- normalize lived experiences
- encourage hope
- share successes
- offer resources

This allows providers to focus on direct services.

## Well-Being Strategies for Family Members

FPS offer families strategies that can reduce their need for additional services, including:

- self-care
- positive parenting
- conflict resolution
- crisis prevention

## Systems Navigation

FPS assist families in accessing support from child, adult, and family serving systems.

Increased use of FPS can lead to more effective systems collaboration and increased family well-being.

## Family-Driven Approach

FPS support families to become confident advocates for family-driven systems.

When families' voices are heard during decision-making and evaluation, systems evolve to become more effective—resulting in satisfied families reaching their goals.



## HOW TO BECOME A NATIONALLY CERTIFIED FAMILY PEER SPECIALIST



1

### **Complete 88 hours of training in the 5 CFPS Core Competencies:**

- Resiliency, Recovery, and Wellness
- Effecting Change
- Resources and Natural Supports
- Systems Knowledge and Navigation
- Professional Responsibilities

2

**Prepare a narrative of your lived experience** as a parent, family member, or caregiver who has or had responsibility parenting a child—across the lifespan—or as a primary caregiver for another family member experiencing mental health and/or substance use challenges for the CFPS Application, completed online.

3

**Complete 500+ hours of paid or volunteer family peer support work.** 20+ hours of this must be supervised. Most family peers work full-time for a family-run organization, health care provider, or other organization offering family peer support for about one to two years before qualifying for national certification.

4

**Pass the national certification exam**, which is 120 questions in 2 hours 15 minutes. This computer-based exam can be taken at local testing centers in your state.

Watch these short videos to learn more about Certified Family Peer Specialists



Learn what important work Family Peer Specialists do to support families.

[Click here to watch](#)



Explore national certification to join this essential workforce.

[Click here to watch](#)



Family Peer Specialists work with staff from child, adult, and family serving systems, which can lead to more effective collaboration and increased family well-being! Integration of Family Peer Specialists on support teams can lead to a family-driven approach. When families' voices are heard during decision-making and evaluation, systems evolve to become more effective—resulting in satisfied families reaching their goals.

[Click here to watch](#)

## Frequently Asked Questions about National Family Peer Specialist Certification

### **How does the National Family Peer Specialist Certification increase the professionalization of the Family Peer Workforce?**

As the national advocacy organization for the family peer workforce, partnering with stakeholders to increase acceptance of families of individuals with mental health and/or substance use challenges, the National Federation of Families (NFF) has the experience and staff capacity to thoroughly vet each candidate for national certification. A Certified Family Peer Specialist (CFPS) application is rigorously reviewed by our certification team to ensure that each applicant has the lived experience, work experience, training, and understanding of ethics and privacy that family peer support requires before inviting the applicant to sit for the national exam.

A national CFPS credential used across the U.S. results in aligned standards and scope of practice, uniformity of core knowledge, and the promotion of ethical practices, as well as encouraging continued professional development through recertification requirements. It offers CFPSs increased professional recognition and acceptance, the confidence that their exam is reliable, and preparation for work they will do as a family peer. Candidate security and confidentiality are prioritized throughout the certification process.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) recognized the validity of NFF's Code of Ethics for CFPSs and included it as an exemplar reference in the [National Model Standards for Peer Support Certification](#) released in June 2023. This Code of Ethics was developed in coordination with a team of family peers, leaders of family-run organizations, providers, and other stakeholders. Read more about NFF's [CFPS Code of Ethics](#).

### **Why is a national exam preferable to a state-based exam?**

Many states that offer Family Peer Specialist credentials use their state's standard adult peer examination as a part of the certification process. Potential family peers might be required to take additional training related to family peer support, but the exams used at the state level often fall short of testing family peers' knowledge of specific skills and strategies unique to family peer support compared to adult peer work.

NFF's 120-question exam was created by a group of subject matter experts that represent a variety of important perspectives related to family peer support work. They completed a Job Task Analysis that resulted in five Core Competencies: 1) Effecting Change, 2) Professional Responsibilities, 3) Systems Knowledge and Navigation, 4) Wellness and Resiliency, and 5) Resources and Natural Supports.

As a national organization, NFF is in the unique position to have the staff capacity and funding to maintain important updates to the certification process to ensure the competencies CFPSs are required to demonstrate are relevant to the ever-changing job demands. For example, in 2019,

NFF convened focus groups and facilitated surveys to better understand the required competencies of CFPS in supporting families of loved ones with substance use challenges. We understand that as family dynamics and desired supports change, it's our responsibility to keep our competencies up to date to ensure that we are preparing the workforce adequately.

NFF has had a long partnership with SAMHSA, the U.S.'s federal agency overseeing behavioral health. Because of our participation in SAMHSA advisory groups, we are able to learn about important changes to federal guidance quickly and nimbly update our certification requirements to reflect these changes. We did this when we removed the criminal background statement from our application and reduced the required number of work experience hours from 1,000 to 500 after SAMHSA's [\*National Model Standards for Peer Support Certification\*](#) were published.

### **What kind of questions are on the national certification exam?**

A full 12-question [\*Practice Exam\*](#) is available online. Below are some sample questions.

#### *Advocating for Improved Outcomes for Families and Youth*

A frustrated family reports that multiple providers don't understand their daughter's needs. How does the FPS model effective partnerships between parents and professionals?

- A. Observe a meeting between parents and providers
- B. Facilitate a conversation between the parents and providers
- C. File a complaint on behalf of the parents against the providers
- D. Share the FPS's own experience as a parent working with providers

#### *Providing Emotional Support*

What is a strategy for validating the parents' experience?

- A. The FPS should share his/her story
- B. The FPS should actively listen as the parents share their experience
- C. The FPS should give helpful advice as the parents share their experience
- D. The FPS should wait to speak until the parents have finished sharing their experience

#### *Strengthening Parents' Skills*

How should the FPS describe advocacy to a parent?

- A. Advocacy is supporting a cause to produce a desired change
- B. Advocacy is doing whatever it takes to be heard, no matter what
- C. Advocacy is learning how to make people fear one's presence at meetings
- D. Advocacy is learning how to take problems straight to the top decision maker

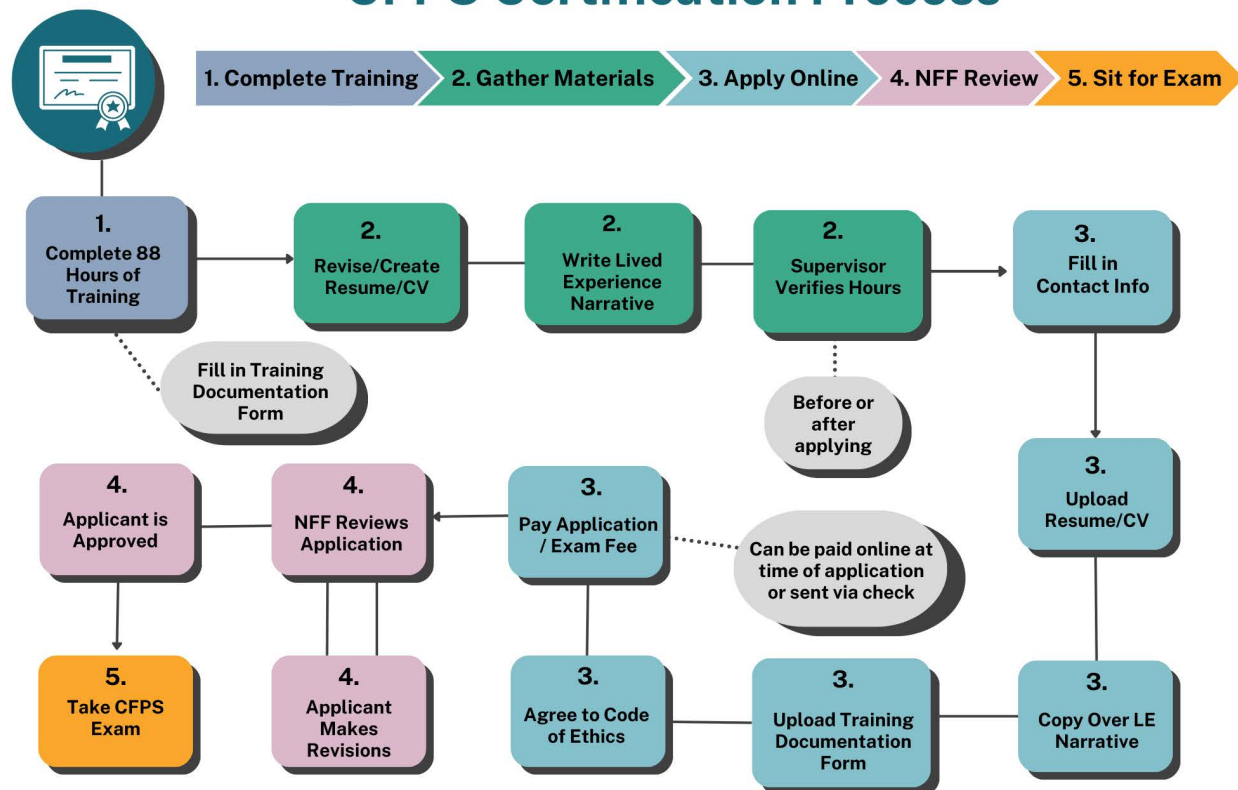


## What is included in the application?

The national [Certified Family Peer Specialist Application](#) includes 8 sections that solicits each candidate's

- Personal and Professional Contact Information
- Resume or CV
- Documentation of Lived Experience
- Work and/or Volunteer Experience of 500 Hours in Family Peer Support
- Verification of 20+ Supervised Hours
- Documentation of 88 Hours of Training, Across the 5 Core Competencies
- Agreement to the CFPS Code of Ethics
- Payment of a \$50 application fee and a \$350 exam

## CFPS Certification Process



## What is the review process for an applicant?

When an application is received, our certification team carefully reviews the resume submitted to ensure that the applicant is currently working or has experience working as a Family Peer Support Specialist or a closely related role providing family peer support. They then review the narrative submitted explaining the applicant's lived experience to ensure it aligns with NFF's ideal of nationally certifying family members with direct lived experience of acting as a caregiver to a family member with mental health and/or substance use challenges. When necessary, an NFF staff member reaches out to

applicants for clarification or more information to determine whether their lived experience meets our standards.

Personal and professional contact information is added to our database of CFPSs and tracked to determine the number of qualified CFPSs in each state. The certification team reviews the Supervisor Verification Form and the Training Documentation Form to determine if the applicant has sufficient work experience and training to meet our standards, asking each candidate to clarify and/or complete additional training, as necessary. If an applicant has all of the above materials, has completed the agreement to the CFPS Code of Ethics, and has paid their application fee, the application packet moves into final review before candidates are invited to pay the exam fee (if they have not already) and sit for the exam.

### **How can states use the National Family Peer Specialist Certification to support their unique credentialing process?**

The United States is a geographically and culturally diverse country with unique goals in each state. We have worked with states who have developed their own training programs to ensure that our exam, which tests each candidate on their knowledge across the five Core Competencies, covers a variety of topics that CFPSs can master to be successful in their work. NFF does not endorse any specific trainings but rather accepts [trainings that directly relate to the work a CFPS does](#). Many family-run organizations who certify their family peers nationally use statewide trainings to prepare candidates for national certification, which is usually more rigorous than state requirements. NFF is available for training and technical assistance to state agencies interested in integrating the National Family Peer Specialist Certification credential into their broader peer support certification program.

## **Share National Certification Flyers**

We have created three digestible flyers to introduce national certification of Family Peer Specialists to different audiences. We encourage you to share any or all the flyers included in this packet as links with your networks to educate more stakeholders!

**Individuals with lived experience** of primary caregiver responsibilities for children or other family members with mental health and/or substance use challenges who might be interested in national certification can learn about the steps for certification in our flyer [How to Become a Nationally Certified Family Peer Specialist](#). **Family-run organizations, managed care organizations**, and other organizations that employ family peers will also find this flyer to be informative!

These individuals and organizations can learn more about why national certification supports the family peer workforce in our flyer [The Value of National Family Peer Specialist Certification](#). To educate these organizations and other child- and family-serving systems staff about what a CFPS does, share our flyer [Why Family Peer Specialists Are Essential](#).

Help us educate more mental health and substance use stakeholders—especially family members with lived experience—about the importance of family peer support work and how certification can increase professionalism and acceptance of mental health and substance use challenges by sharing these flyers and this information packet with your network!

**Please reach out to us at [certification@ffcmh.org](mailto:certification@ffcmh.org) with any questions!**