



Department of
**Mental Health &
Substance Abuse Services**



Family Support Specialist Certification Program

Guidelines, Standards, and Procedures

Tennessee Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse
Handbook | Revised July 2025

Preface

Direct caregiver-to-caregiver support services provided by a Certified Family Support Specialist (CFSS) are a vital resource to assist families and others who are caring for children and youth with *emotional, behavioral, mental health, substance use challenges, co-occurring disorders, and/or autism spectrum disorders*. To achieve the child's and family's resiliency and recovery goals, the CFSS promotes self-determination, personal responsibility, and the skills, knowledge, and confidence to advocate for a child, youth, and/or young adult child effectively and inspires a sense of hope that resiliency and recovery are achievable goals.

To be certified as a Family Support Specialist in the State of Tennessee, you must:

- Self-identify as being or having been the biological parent, adoptive parent, foster parent, or authorized relative caregiver of a child or youth with *emotional, behavioral, mental health, substance use challenges, and/or autism spectrum disorder*. (TDMHSAS reserves the right to request supporting documentation of diagnosis and/or guardianship);
- Meet specific competency and ethical conduct requirements;
- Possess minimum work and/or volunteer experience requirements;
- Possess minimum education and training requirements;
- Pass the written competency course exam; and
- Complete minimum continuing education credits annually.

Property of Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (TDMHSAS)

All materials uploaded to the CADRE online portal as part of the certification process are considered property of the TDMHSAS. These include, but are not limited to, applications, evaluations, transcripts, and certificates. Applicants are encouraged to keep copies of all materials and paperwork submitted for certification.

All certificates and supporting letters are the property of the TDMHSAS and must be surrendered upon request.

All TDMHSAS certification requirements, policies, and procedures are maintained on our website at: www.tn.gov/behavioral-health. For further information, please contact: ffcfss.tdmhsas@tn.gov

Accommodations

We are committed to the full inclusion of all qualified individuals. As part of this commitment, we will ensure that persons with disabilities are provided reasonable accommodations. If accommodations are needed to participate in the pre-requisite or FSS Competency Course training, please contact our office at ffcfss.tdmhsas@tn.gov.

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Family Support Specialist Certification Program

III. Introduction

The Family Support Specialist Certification Program (FSSCP) provides the State of Tennessee certification for individuals who provide direct *caregiver-to-caregiver* support services to families of children and youth with *emotional, behavioral, mental health, substance use challenges, co-occurring disorder, and/or autism spectrum disorder*. Due to their life experience as a caregiver for a child or youth with these disorders and navigating *child-serving systems*, Certified Family Support Specialists (CFSSs) can use their unique experience to inspire hope and provide support to others who are facing similar challenges.

This program allows Certified Family Support Specialists to provide a level of service and support beyond that of clinical staff. The Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services' Division of Children and Youth Mental Health (C&Y MH Division) operates Tennessee's Certified Family Support Specialist Program with consultation from the CFSS Advisory Committee. The C&Y MH Division shall develop and reserve the right to make any necessary changes to CFSS Guidelines, Standards, and Procedures without prior notification so that appropriate authority to grant certification and acceptable professional standards are established.

This certification does not imply that CFSS is qualified to diagnose an illness, prescribe medication, or provide clinical treatment services. CFSSs do not provide treatment of any kind. The CFSS program is not an offer of employment or job placement by the TDMHSAS. Certification in no way guarantees employment. Each person certified as a CFSS should apply for positions available in their community. Each CFSS must be under supervision as defined by the state.

The Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services does not conduct criminal background checks when issuing Family Support Specialist certifications. Accordingly, the department neither forms nor offers any opinion regarding any information contained therein. Any person or entity with an interest in that information should conduct a criminal background check themselves to determine if any particular Certified Family Support Specialist is an appropriate person to conduct the CFSS services sought.

All applicants are screened against the Tennessee Abuse Registry and the Tennessee Sex Offender Registry. Any applicants on either registry will not be approved for certification.

IV. Purpose

The purpose of a certification system for the Family Support Specialist is to:

1. Ensure the public a minimum level of competency for quality services by Certified Family Support Specialists (CFSS).
2. Give professional recognition to qualified CFSS through a process that examines demonstrated work competencies.
3. Assure an opportunity for ongoing professional development for CFSS.
4. Promote professional and ethical practices by enforcing adherence to a Code of Ethics

The Certified Family Support Specialist can perform various tasks to assist *caregivers* in managing their child's illness while fostering *resiliency* and *hope* in the recovery process. These direct *caregiver-to-caregiver* support services include but are not limited to developing formal and informal supports, assisting in the development

of *strengths-based* family and individual goals, serving as an *advocate, mentor, or facilitator* for resolution of issues that a *caregiver* is unable to resolve on their own, or providing education on system navigation and skills necessary to maintain a child with *mental, emotional, behavioral, co-occurring disorders, and/or autism spectrum disorder* in their home environment.

V. Definition of a Certified Family Support Specialist

A Certified Family Support Specialist (CFSS) is a person who has self-identified as the *birth parent, adoptive parent, foster parent, or authorized* caregiver* of a child or youth with an *emotional, behavioral, mental health, substance use challenges, co-occurring disorder and/or autism spectrum disorder* and who has successfully navigated the child-serving systems to access treatment and resources necessary to build *resiliency* and foster success in the home, school, and community. This individual has successfully completed training recognized by TDMHSAS on how to assist other *caregivers* in fostering *resiliency* in their child, based on the principles of *resiliency* and *recovery*.

*Authorized caregiver notary form located on page 24.

VI. Guidelines for Certification

A. Certification Eligibility Requirements

For an individual to be eligible to become a Certified Family Support Specialist in the state of Tennessee, they must meet the following minimum qualifications of personal experience and training.

- Have at least six months' experience (paid and/or volunteer) as a *Family Support Specialist, Support Group Facilitator, or Caregiver Educator, and/or other relevant experience*.

OR if you DO NOT have a minimum of SIX MONTHS' PAID/VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE as a Family Support Specialist, you must:

- Immediately upon hire, complete 60 hours of TDMHSAS-specific training and complete 75 hours of supervised paid or volunteer work under the direct guidance of a TDMHSAS-recognized supervisor. (Complete training listing can be found in Appendix B).

- 1) Be at least eighteen (18) years of age or older;
- 2) Hold a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED or higher from an accredited institution);
- 3) Self-identify as being or having been the *birth parent, adoptive parent, foster parent, or authorized* caregiver* of a child or youth with an *emotional, behavioral, mental health, substance use challenges, co-occurring disorder and/or autism spectrum disorder* and who has successfully navigated the child-serving systems to access treatment and resources necessary to build *resiliency* and foster success in the home, school, and community (TDMHSAS reserves the right to request supporting documentation of diagnosis and/or guardianship);

- 4) Provide a statement of personal experience regarding navigating the child-serving systems as the *primary caregiver* of a child or youth with a *mental, emotional, behavioral, co-occurring disorder and/or autism spectrum disorder*;
- 5) During the last ten (10) years (in employment and/or volunteer work), have actively participated for at least twelve (12) consecutive months in service planning, system navigation, and building *resiliency* for a child or youth in a support capacity in any or all of the following roles:
- **Family Support Provider:** a person eighteen (18) years of age or older trained to act as an *advocate, support, and care coordinator* for *caregivers* of children and youth with *mental, emotional, behavioral, co-occurring disorders and/or autism spectrum disorder*.
 - **Caregiver Educator:** a person eighteen (18) years of age or older who has lived experience and has been trained to provide information and education to other *caregivers* so they can make sound decisions about the *resiliency and recovery* process and treatment. Examples include, but are not limited to, being a family education course teacher, teaching various educational topics at a psychosocial program, or providing *caregivers* with educational activities that promote *resiliency and recovery*.
 - **Support Group Facilitator:** a person eighteen (18) years of age or older trained to lead self-help activities in a group setting to provide emotional support to the participants. These groups can be structured around specific support needs, which include, but are not limited to, support groups for parents of children with serious emotional disturbance (SED), co-occurring disorders (COD), and/or autism spectrum disorder, as well as women's or men's support groups.
 - **Other Relevant Experience:** a person eighteen (18) years of age or older with other employment or volunteer experience that enhances and supports work as a Family Support Specialist. This experience may be considered if appropriate documentation related to the employment or volunteer program, mission, and objective is approved by the C&Y MH Division.
- 6) Successfully complete the *evidence-based* and/or *best practice* prerequisite training currently recognized by TDMHSAS listed below:
- **ONE** of the following trainings*
 - (a) National Alliance on Mental Illness of Tennessee's (NAMI-TN) Family Education Program (BASICS, Family-to-Family, or Peer-to-Peer);
 - (b) Tennessee Voices for Children's (TVC) Parent-2-Parent Training;
 - (c) Other *evidence-based* and/or *best practice* family support specialist training programs may be considered if appropriate documentation related to the program's curriculum, requirements, and *competencies* is approved by the C&Y MH Division (Positive Solutions for Families, Nurturing Parenting, or How To Talk So Kids Will Listen).

***Please note that one of the above trainings must be completed before enrolling in a recognized evidence-based/and/or best practice FSS Training Course.**

FOLLOWED BY

- Family Support Specialist Competencies Training Course offered by TN Voices.
Completing the FSSC Training Course cannot exceed twelve months (1 year). *Must*

complete 90 days of employment or volunteer experience before acceptance into the FSS Competency Training Course.

OR

- Effective December 1, 2013, applicants may provide documentation of Certification as a Parent Support Provider through the National Certification Commission for Family Support to serve in lieu of the currently required State of Tennessee trainings.
- Other *evidence-based* and/or *best practice* family support specialist training programs may be considered if the C&Y MH Division approves appropriate documentation related to the program's curriculum, requirements, and competencies.

7) Successfully demonstrate mastery of the following *competencies* through testing and evaluation as required by one of the *evidence-based* and/or *best-practice* Family Support Specialist Training Programs recognized by TDMHSAS:

- An understanding of the basic skills and knowledge needed to provide direct *caregiver-to-caregiver* support services and the ability to apply basic skills to routine tasks. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:
 - Knowledge of the structure of the *child-serving systems* and how they work.
 - Knowledge of the *child-serving systems* and community resources and how to access them.
 - An understanding of the Certified Family Support Specialist's Scope of Activities.
 - An understanding of the Certified Family Support Specialist Code of Ethics.
 - Knowledge of the meaning and role of providing direct *caregiver-to-caregiver* support services as a Certified Family Support Specialist.
 - Knowledge of how to document activities related to the delivery of direct *caregiver-to-caregiver* support services.
 - Knowledge of how to help *caregivers* combat negative self-talk, overcome fears, and solve problems.
 - Knowledge of how to help *caregivers* articulate, set, and accomplish goals.
 - Knowledge of how to teach *caregivers* to create their own family and *individualized plans of care*.
 - Knowledge of how to teach *caregivers* to work with mental health, *co-occurring disorders*, or *autism spectrum disorder* professionals to obtain the services they want.
 - Knowledge of how to create and facilitate various family and individual activities that support and strengthen *resiliency*.
- An understanding of *resiliency* and the ability to use their personal story to help others. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:
 - How *resiliency* is fostered in children and youth, and what is helpful and what is not helpful.
 - The ability to identify the power of a *caregiver's* beliefs and values and how they support or work against success.
 - The basic definition and dynamics of the *wraparound* process.
 - The ability to articulate what has been helpful and what has not been helpful in their experience as a *caregiver*.
 - The ability to discern when and how much of one's personal story to share and with whom.

- An understanding of *healing and collaborative relationships* and the ability to establish such relationships with other *caregivers* and within the workplace. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:
 - The dynamics of relationships, including power differentials, conflict, and trust.
 - The ability to apply this knowledge to deal personally with conflict and difficult *interpersonal relations*.
 - The concept of *seeking out common ground* in establishing collaborative relationships.
 - The meaning and importance of family and *cultural* differences and beliefs.
 - The ability to ask *open-ended questions* that direct a person to their strengths.
 - The ability to participate in *healing communication*.
 - The ability to interact sensitively and effectively with people of other *cultures*.
 - The role of direct support to *caregivers* of children or youth with *mental, emotional, behavioral, co-occurring disorders and/or autism spectrum disorder*.
- An understanding of the importance of and the ability to maintain *self-care*. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:
 - The dynamics of *stress* and burnout.
 - The role of one's *wellness plan*.
 - The ability to identify one's strategies for *self-care*.
 - The ability to develop and utilize a *support network* for personal and professional activities.

8) Either as an employee or a volunteer, be under the direct supervision of a *mental health professional*. (Section IX—Employment and Volunteer Guidelines).

9) Read, understand, and agree to the following:

- The Certified Family Support Specialist's Scope of Activities; and
- The Certified Family Support Specialist Code of Ethics.

B. Term of Certification

The term of certification shall be two (2) years.

VII. Certification Procedure

The applicant must ensure that all required documents are ***accurately completed*** and ***submitted via the CADRE online portal***.

The completed application and other required documents must be uploaded to the CADRE portal. If you have questions or need assistance, please contact our office at Ffcfss.tdmhsas@tn.gov.

- Required application documents to complete **FOR INITIAL CERTIFICATION ONLY:**
 - ✓ Answer Statement of Personal Experience questions.

- ✓ Upload your high school diploma, General Educational Development (GED), or College Degree from an accredited institution.
 - ✓ Contact information for Employer/Volunteer Supervisor (supervising person must meet the requirements in section XI, Employment and Volunteer Guidelines). The Employment/Volunteer Summary Form must be completed, signed, and submitted via the online portal by the direct supervisor.
 - ✓ Upload the certificate of completion/attendance from one of the required pre-requisite trainings recognized by TDMHSAS (**training must have been completed before participation in a recognized FSS Competency Course**).
 - ✓ Upload the certificate of completion from the required *evidence-based* and/or *best practice* Family Support Specialist Competency Course Training currently recognized by TDMHSAS (**Certificates of completion MUST be dated within 365 days of course completion**).
 - ✓ Submit contact information for three (3) Letters of Reference.
 - ✓ Electronically Sign the Acknowledgement of the Certified Family Support Specialist ***Scope of Activities***.
 - ✓ Electronically Sign the Acknowledgement of the Certified Family Support Specialist ***Code of Ethics***.
- If the submitted application packet **is incomplete**, a deficiency email affirming the missing documentation will be sent to the applicant. The C&Y MH Division must receive all documentation requested in the deficiency email within ninety (90) calendar days of the date of the deficiency email. An application packet not completed within ninety (90) calendar days will be closed. The applicant will be notified via Email of closure and instructed to submit a new application packet with all the required documentation for consideration.
 - When the application packet is complete, the C&Y MH Division will promptly review the file and make a certification determination. Upon full review, the applicant will receive notification via Email regarding the determination within forty-five (45) calendar days of complete submission.

For questions about the application process, contact the Division of Children and Youth Mental Health at Ffcfss.tdmhsas@tn.gov or visit [CFSS](#). *Please note that pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 10-7-503, all state records are considered open for public inspection, unless otherwise protected under the law. Accordingly, the State cannot and does not guarantee the confidentiality of this application, any notes, files, reports, or other documents received by the State or in possession of the State in conjunction with this application*

The **C&Y MH Division will only discuss the application status with the applicant.** Please inform all others that updates must be obtained from the applicant.

VIII. Certification Renewal

A. Certification Renewal Procedure

Certification expires in two (2) years. To maintain an active certification status, the Certified Family Support Specialist must ensure that all required documents are accurately completed and submitted via the [CADRE ONLINE PORTAL](#).

- Required application documents **FOR RENEWAL CERTIFICATION ONLY**:
 - ✓ Complete and submit a Certification Renewal application forty-five (45) days before the end of their current certification period;
 - ✓ If employed (must be with an agency that is a TDMHSAS-licensed or otherwise approved agency), submit an employment form signed by the supervisor;
 - ✓ If volunteering (must be with an agency that is a TDMHSAS-licensed or otherwise approved agency), submit the volunteer form signed by the supervisor;
 - ✓ Remain under the direct supervision of a *mental health professional* as defined by TDMHSAS;
 - ✓ Upload thirty hours (30) of documentation of the successful completion of recognized continuing education trainings (**fifteen (15) hours per year**);
 - ✓ Have no reports of violation of the CFSS Code of Ethics; and
 - ✓ Contact information for Employer/Volunteer Supervisor (supervising person must meet the requirements in section XI, Employment and Volunteer Guidelines). The Employment/Volunteer Summary Form must be completed, signed, and submitted via the online portal by the direct supervisor.
 - ✓ Electronically Sign the Acknowledgement of the Certified Family Support Specialist ***Scope of Activities***.
 - ✓ Electronically Sign the Acknowledgement of the Certified Family Support Specialist ***Code of Ethics***.

Each Certified Family Support Specialist will receive notification from the CADRE system to renew their certification. The FSS must submit the Certification Renewal application and all other required documentation at least forty-five (45) calendar days before the end of the current certification period.

A Certification renewal received forty-five (45) calendar days or more after the original expiration date **WILL BE MOVED INTO INACTIVE STATUS** by the C&Y MH Division for up to 12 months. If renewal is not completed during this 12-month period the FSS certification will expire, and applicant will need to follow the procedures of Reactivation (X. Inactive Status, B. Reactivation of Certification).

NOTE: Everyone who is certified as a Family Support Specialist must notify the Division of Children and Youth, in writing to Ffcfss.tdmhsas@tn.gov, within fourteen (14) business days of the following:

- ✓ Change in name, address, email, or other contact information after updating this information on the CADRE dashboard.
- ✓ Change in the agency staff person responsible for providing supervision (even if the agency does not change). Each CFSS must be under supervision as defined by the State.
- ✓ If you have a professional license and any action is taken against that license.
- ✓ If you are placed on the Tennessee Department of Health Abuse Registry or the Tennessee Sex Offender Registry.

B. Ongoing Continuing Education Guidelines

- 1) The Certified Family Support Specialist will keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to resiliency, family-driven care, and child/adolescent issues and will share this knowledge with other Certified Family Support Specialists.

Continuing education is required for a CFSS to renew their certification annually, and it must be earned within the annual certification period.

- Continuing education trainings are not transferable to any other certification period.
- Educational trainings completed prior to obtaining certification as a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist are not eligible for maintaining certification.
- Thirty (30) hours of ongoing CFSS education are required over a two-year period to maintain active certification. These hours must be earned within the certification period (15 hours per year). Ongoing education training is not transferable to any other certification period and is intended to enhance the CFSS's knowledge and skill base.

Certified Family Support Specialists must complete:

- All in-service trainings required by their employing or volunteer agency;
- TDMHSAS Title VI Training <https://www.tn.gov/behavioral-health/providers/training/crisis-services-and-suicide-prevention-training/title-vi.html> (once in the two-year cycle);
- One and a half hours of (1.5) **Ethics** training (yearly); **and**
- A minimum of four (4) ongoing CFSS education trainings, seminars, workshops, or post-secondary courses totaling thirty (30) hours (over a two-year period) within the following categories:
 - System of Care 101
 - High-fidelity Wraparound
 - Family Dynamics
 - Juvenile Justice
 - Cultural Linguistic Competency
 - Special Education Law and Rights
 - Child Welfare
 - Substance Abuse in Adolescence
 - Child and Youth Development
 - Social and Emotional Skills
 - Basic Wellness in families
 - Suicide Awareness and Prevention
 - Recovery in the Fields of Mental Health, Co-Occurring Disorders, and/or Autism Spectrum Disorder
 - Family Engagement/Family Dynamics
 - Parenting Enhancement
 - Caregiver Support Services Promoting Resiliency and Recovery

Note: **Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), First aid, participation on advisory councils/boards, driver education classes, and firearm safety classes will not be accepted for consideration of Continuing Education hours.**

Online webinar trainings are limited to five (5) hours of the 15 required per year. A minimum of one and a half (1.5) hours of Continuing Education per year must be in **Ethics. Continuing education that is fully focused on clinical treatment will not be accepted.**

C. Verification Procedure

Ongoing Education Verification documentation for each training event must be uploaded into the CADRE training portal. The information below is required to confirm the successful completion of the C&Y MH Division recognized ongoing CFSS education training:

- Certificate of Attendance and/or Completion
 - CFSS Name;
 - The trainer must sign the certificate;
 - **Training Date** and number of **Training hours** must be on the certificate, and
 - Title and/or Category of the Training.

OR

- For post-secondary courses in behavioral-health-related subjects, a syllabus signed by the professor, with a copy of grades for the course or a transcript showing a course and final passing grade.

All CEU training documentation must be uploaded **individually** into the CADRE ONLINE PORTAL. Applicants should maintain original copies of ongoing education documentation.

IX. Denial, Suspension, or Revocation of Certification, and Reconsideration

Certification or recertification as a Certified Family Support Specialist (CFSS) may be granted, denied, suspended, or revoked at the sole discretion of the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (TDMHSAS) as it deems fit. There is no legal right to or interest in being granted certification as a CFSS, and being granted certification does not create a legal right to or interest in retaining certification. Although TDMHSAS may choose to reconsider any decision it makes regarding the denial, suspension, or revocation of a CFSS certification, there is no legal right to reconsideration or to review or appeal of TDMHSAS's decision regarding the same.

If an individual's CFSS certification is denied, suspended, or revoked, then that individual's employer is prohibited from billing for services that require them to be a certified CFSS. If the individual is employed or volunteering in a position that requires them to be a certified CFSS, they must immediately notify their employer or the entity for which they are volunteering should their certification be suspended or revoked.

Anyone who is not recognized as a certified CFSS by TDMHSAS is prohibited from presenting themselves as someone who is certified as a CFSS by TDMHSAS.

Should an application for certification or for recertification be denied, or if certification is suspended or revoked, TDMHSAS shall attempt to notify the individual of its decision by mail addressed to the last physical address and/or email address provided by the individual. The ability of TDMHSAS to take any such action is not limited or conditioned on its ability to notify the individual. Individuals who are applicants for certification or recertification or who are currently certified shall keep the TDMHSAS' Division of Children and Youth informed of their current physical address and email address by emailing that information to Fcfss.tdmhsas@tn.gov.

When TDMHSAS denies, suspends, or revokes a CFSS certification or request for recertification, the individual has thirty (30) calendar days during which to request reconsideration by TDMHSAS should the individual wish to do so. An extension of this deadline may be granted upon a showing of good cause by the individual. All requests for reconsideration or for an extension of time and any supporting documentation the individual wishes TDMHSAS to

consider must be submitted via email to Fcfss.tdmhsas@tn.gov. TDMHSAS will notify the individual of its decision at the physical address and/or email address provided by the individual in their request for reconsideration. TDMHSAS will also notify the individual of when they may reapply for certification, if applicable.

X. Inactive Status

A. Deactivation of Certification

A Certified Family Support Specialist whose certification is in good standing with TDMHSAS and is in good standing with their employer or volunteer agency may request inactive status for up to two (2) years* if unable to meet the requirements of certification due to, but not limited to, the following:

- A decline in physical health and/or mental health. *Indefinite approval by CFSS—Advisory Council if necessitated by health.
- Temporary relocation out of the State of Tennessee.
- Extenuating personal circumstances.

Examples:

- Death of a spouse, child, parent, or close relative,
- Illness of a spouse, child, parent, or close relative,
- Divorce or marriage,
- “Loss of” or “Change in” employment/volunteer status,
- Birth of a child,
- Military Deployment, or
- Other extenuating employment/volunteer circumstances as detailed to C&Y MH Division and approved appropriately by the CFSS Advisory Council.

The CFSS is responsible for ensuring that all required documents are completed and submitted on the CARDE portal. Inactive certifications can be reactivated within 24 months from the renewal date. CFSSs who wish to reactivate their certification status following inactivity must complete one (1) hour of continuing education for every month they have been inactive. CFSSs in **inactive status cannot provide Medicaid billable (TennCare) services.**

The completed Inactive Status Form and other required documents must be submitted via the CADRE online portal.

B. Reactivation of Certification

Reactivating an expired certification may be accomplished by submitting all documents required by the C&Y MH Division. After two years of Inactive status, the Family Support Specialist Certification will be terminated. CFSSs who wish to reactivate their certification status following inactive status must complete one (1) hour of continuing education for every month they have been inactive. **After twenty-four (24) months of non-renewal, an applicant will be required to meet all of the requirements of a new applicant, which includes the re-take and passing of the FSS Competency Course.** For more information, please contact the C&Y MH Division at fcfss.tdmhsas@tn.gov.

XI. Employment and Volunteer Guidelines

A Certified Family Support Specialist (CFSS), either employed or volunteering, must be under the direct supervision of a mental health professional as defined by TDMHSAS Licensure Rules. A mental health professional, as determined by TDMHSAS, is a board-eligible or board-certified psychiatrist or a person with at least a master's degree and/or clinical training in an accepted child serving field from an accredited institution of higher learning, which includes, but is not limited to, counseling, nursing, psychology, social work, education, juvenile justice, vocational rehabilitation, nurse practitioner, or activity therapy.

As part of their job/volunteer duties, a CFSS must perform tasks described in the CFSS Scope of Activities. The Scope of Activities shows the wide range of tasks a CFSS can perform to assist the child or youth and the family in regaining control over their own lives based on the principles of *resiliency* and *recovery*. The ability to perform any or all of the tasks in the course of the CFSS's job duties is demonstrated by the mastery of *competencies* through testing and evaluation as required by the Family Support Specialist Competency Training Programs recognized by TDMHSAS (see Section VI.A.6).

XII. Supervision Requirements

Certified Family Support Specialists, either employed or volunteering, must be under the general supervision of a mental health professional in accordance with acceptable guidelines and standards of practice as defined by the State and as defined in the [TDMHSAS Licensure rules, Chapter 0940-05-01](#), as follows:

"Mental Health Professional" means a board-eligible or board-certified psychiatrist or a person with at least a Master's degree and/or clinical training in an accepted mental health field, which includes, but is not limited to, counseling, nursing, occupational therapy, psychology, social work, vocational rehabilitation, or activity therapy."

The amount, duration, and scope of supervision of a Certified Family Support Specialist may range from direct oversight to periodic care consultation.

A supervisor of CFSS shall meet the following criteria:

1. **TRAINING:** Complete supervision training that includes understanding how to support the role of a Certified Family Support Specialist.
2. **EDUCATION/EXPERIENCE:**
 - a. Be a mental health professional or qualified professional in accordance with acceptable guidelines and standards of practice as defined by the State and as defined in the TDMHSAS Licensure rules, Chapter 0940-05-01, or
 - b. Be a current CFSS with at least 6,000 hours of experience working as a CFSS and have regular, ongoing consultation with a child and youth-serving systems professional.

XIII. Employment Standards for Reimbursable Services

If the delivery of the Certified Family Support Specialist (CFSS) service is to be rendered as a Medicaid (TennCare) covered service, then the following guidelines must be met:

- Applicants must be employed to work as a paid CFSS by an agency licensed by TDMHSAS and authorized to participate in the Medicaid (TennCare) program.
- Agencies that are licensed by TDMHSAS and authorized to participate in the Medicaid (TennCare) program shall:
 - Establish criteria under which they hire, train, and retain CFSSs.

- Provide supervision for CFSS following acceptable guidelines and standards of practice as defined by the State and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.
- Each CFSS providing Medicaid-reimbursable services must be supervised by a mental health professional as defined by the State. The mental health professional must work for an agency licensed by TDMHSAS and authorized to participate in the Medicaid program. The amount, duration, and scope of supervision may range from direct oversight to periodic care consultation.

XIV. Grievance Procedure

1. When an applicant is denied certification, questions the outcome of an application review, or is subjected to an action by the Children & Youth Mental Health (C&Y MH Division) that he or she deems unjustified, the applicant may file a grievance when there is a valid, factual reason to dispute a determination made by the C&Y MH Division.
 - a. The applicant has thirty (30) calendar days from the receipt of notice, denial, or any other action the applicant deems unjustified to file a grievance.
 - b. The grievance must include the following:
 - i. Name of the party filing the grievance.
 - ii. Date of receipt of the notice or denial.
 - iii. Detailed explanation for the grievance.
 1. Cite all relevant documentation and portions of the handbook relating to the grievance.
 2. Attach any supporting documentation.
2. Once C&Y MH Division receives the grievance, it will be reviewed, and all identifying information will be removed.
 - a. The de-identified grievance will be submitted to the Family Support Specialist Advisory Council (FSS-AC).
 - b. At least five (5) reviewers from the FSS-AC will be required to submit feedback indicating their decision to uphold or deny the grievance.
 - c. The C&Y MH Division Assistant Commissioner will review the FSS-AC's grievance and findings and decide whether to uphold or deny the grievance.
 - d. A letter will be sent from the Assistant Commissioner indicating the outcome of the grievance.

The applicant must submit the grievance within thirty (30) calendar days of receipt of notice of denial or of any other action deemed by the applicant to be unjustified. It is the applicant's responsibility to submit the grievance, and any other documents required by the C&Y MH Division to:

TN Dept. of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services
 Division of Children and Youth Mental Health
ATTN: Family Support Specialist Program
 Andrew Jackson Building, 5th Floor
 500 Deaderick Street
 Nashville, TN 37243

Please allow forty-five (45) business days for documents mailed to the C&Y MH Division to be received and reviewed.

The C&Y MH Division will only discuss the grievance status with the applicant. Please inform all others that updates must be obtained from the applicant.

XV. Program Oversight

The TDMHSAS Division of Children & Youth Mental Health administers the FSSCP.

- The FSS Advisory Council is comprised of Certified Family Support Specialists appointed by the C&Y MH Division and representatives from TDMHSAS, family and children organizations, Bureau of TennCare, and other relevant entities in the *child and youth-serving systems*. The Advisory Council shall provide guidance on certification standards, procedures, and training. The Advisory Council has the authority to review applications and make recommendations for certification, recertification, and decertification to TDMHSAS based on the requirements as outlined by the FSSCP Guidelines, Standards, and Procedures. The Advisory Council is also involved in reviewing grievances and providing input on certification process issues as requested by TDMHSAS.
- TDMHSAS, through the C&Y MH Division, is the certification-authorizing entity. It is responsible for program standards and administration and makes the final decision on each applicant's certification, recertification, and decertification.
- The Children & Youth Division of Mental Health Services (C & Y DMH) provides guidance related to funding and the CFSS's role within the service delivery system.

The C&Y MH Division shall develop and revise, as needed, the FSSCP Guidelines, Standards, and Procedures so that the appropriate authority to grant certification and set acceptable professional standards is established.

XVI. Certified Family Support Specialist Scope of Activities

In rendering services to children, youth, and families, the CFSS follows the *system of care* (SOC) values and principles:

- Services should be *child-centered*, community-based, and *culturally and linguistically competent*.
- Services should be *family-driven* and *youth-guided*.
- Children with mental, emotional, behavioral (MEB), co-occurring disorders, and/or autism spectrum disorders should have access to a comprehensive array of services that address the child's physical, emotional, social, and educational needs.
- Children with MEB, co-occurring disorders, and/or autism spectrum disorders should receive individualized services in accordance with the unique needs and potentials of each child and guided by an *individualized service plan*.
- Children with MEB, co-occurring disorders, and/or autism spectrum disorders should receive services within the least restrictive, most normative environment that is clinically appropriate
- The families and surrogate families of children with MEB should be full participants in all aspects of the planning and delivery of services.
- Children with MEB, *co-occurring disorders, and/or autism spectrum disorders* should receive services that are integrated, with linkages between child-serving agencies and programs and mechanisms for planning, developing, and coordinating services.
- Children with MEB, co-occurring disorders, and/or autism spectrum disorders should be provided with *case management* or similar mechanisms to ensure that multiple services are delivered in a coordinated and therapeutic manner and that they can move through the system of services in accordance with their changing needs.
- The SOC should promote early identification and intervention for children with MEB to enhance the likelihood of positive outcomes.
- Children with MEB, co-occurring disorders, and/or autism spectrum disorders should ensure smooth transitions to the adult service system as they reach maturity.
- The rights of children with MEB, co-occurring disorders, and/or autism spectrum disorders should be protected, and effective advocacy efforts for children and youth with MEB, co-occurring disorders, and/or autism spectrum disorders should be promoted.
- Children with MEB, co-occurring disorders, and/or autism spectrum disorders should receive services without regard to race, religion, national origin, sex, physical disability, or other characteristics, and services should be sensitive and responsive to *cultural differences* and special needs.

The Scope of Activities shows the wide range of tasks a Certified Family Support Specialist can perform to assist children, youth, and families in regaining control over their own lives based on the principles of *resiliency*. The Certified Family Support Specialist does not diagnose an illness, prescribe medication, or provide clinical services.

- 1) Utilizing unique experiences as a *caregiver* of a child or youth with MEB, *co-occurring disorders, and/or autism spectrum disorder*, the Certified Family Support Specialist shall:
 - a) Teach and role model the value of every individual's experience caring for a child or youth with an MEB, *co-occurring disorder, and/or autism spectrum disorder*;
 - b) Model effective coping techniques and advocacy skills;
 - c) Encourage *caregivers* to develop informal and formal networks of support that are responsive to the *culture* and unique needs of their child and family;

- d) Foster a full and equal partnership with the child, family, and *caregiver*.
- 2) Utilizing direct *caregiver-to-caregiver* support and interaction and a goal-setting process, the Certified Family Support Specialist shall:
- a) Educate *caregivers* regarding diagnoses, causes of disorders, treatments, and treatment adherence techniques.
 - b) Understand and utilize specific interventions necessary to assist *caregivers* in developing a *Child and Family Team*, as well as establishing and meeting their child and family's individualized goals;
 - c) Lead as well as model how to facilitate collaborative working relationships with providers, school staff, and other professionals to positively transform the treatment experience of the child, youth, and family;
 - d) Teach relevant skills needed for effective advocacy and navigation of the *child-serving systems*, including child welfare, juvenile justice, education, mental health, and transition services;
 - e) Assist *caregivers* in meeting their child's or youth's educational needs through support, education, and guidance in school-related meetings (504, Individual Education Plans, etc.) and the special education system;
 - f) Assist *caregivers* in identifying and connecting with services addressing substance abuse, *co-occurring disorders*, or *autism spectrum disorder*, as well as providing information and other resources;
 - g) Teach the child, family, and *caregiver* how to identify and utilize their strengths in achieving the family's goals;
 - h) Assist *caregivers* in articulating their goals and objectives for their family;
 - i) Assist *caregivers* in creating their *Child and Family Team* and *individualized service plan* (e.g., *wraparound plan*, *crisis plan*, etc.);
 - j) Assist *caregivers* in establishing and maintaining informal and formal supports;
 - k) Assist *caregivers* in learning how to access community resources and in making positive treatment choices for their child and family;
 - l) Appropriately document activities provided to *caregivers* in either their individual records or program records;
 - m) Assist *caregivers* in identifying resources for specialty services such as DD/MR, adult children with special needs, medically fragile, etc.
- 3) The Certified Family Support Specialist shall maintain a working knowledge of current trends and developments in the fields of mental health, *co-occurring disorders*, autism spectrum disorders, education/special education, child welfare regulations, child/adolescent development and essential wellness, SOC, and *peer support* services by:
- a) Reading books, current journals, and other relevant material;
 - b) Developing and sharing *strengths-based* material with other Certified Family Support Specialists; and
 - c) Attending recognized seminars, workshops, and educational trainings.
- 4) The Certified Family Support Specialist shall serve as a *caregiver* support agent by:
- a) Providing and promoting effective family-based services (e.g., *wraparound*, Parents as Teachers, etc.);
 - b) Assisting *caregivers* in obtaining services that are responsive to each family's

- individual needs and *culture*;
- c) Assisting *caregivers* in becoming *advocates* for their child through knowledge, skills, and confidence;
 - d) Assisting *caregivers* in developing problem-solving skills to respond effectively to child and/or family crises;
 - e) Fostering a sense of hope and *resiliency* in *caregivers*;
 - f) Sharing their unique perspective on caring for a child or youth with MEB, *co-occurring disorders*, or *autism spectrum disorder* with non-*caregiver* staff; and
 - g) Assisting non-*caregiver* staff in identifying programs and environments that foster hope and *resiliency* and are *family-driven* and *youth-guided* in nature.

XVII. Certified Family Support Specialist Code of Ethics

These principles will guide Certified Family Support Specialists in their various roles, relationships, and levels of responsibility in which they function professionally.

- 2) A Certified Family Support Specialist's primary responsibility is to help caregivers achieve their families' identified needs, wants, and goals.
- 3) The Certified Family Support Specialist will maintain high personal and professional conduct standards.
- 4) The Certified Family Support Specialist will conduct themselves in a manner that maintains their personal wellness.
- 5) The Certified Family Support Specialist will openly share with *caregivers*, other CFSSs, and non-caregivers their stories as a *caregiver* of a child or youth with MEB, *co-occurring disorders*, and/or autism disorder, as appropriate for the situation, to promote and support *resiliency*.
- 6) The Certified Family Support Specialist will always respect the rights and dignity of those they serve.
- 7) The Certified Family Support Specialist will never intimidate, threaten, harass, use undue influence, use physical force, use verbal abuse, or make unwarranted promises of benefits to the individuals he or she serves.
- 8) The Certified Family Support Specialist will not practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate in any form of discrimination based on ethnicity, race, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, marital status, political belief, mental or physical disability, military and/or veteran status, or any other preference or personal characteristic, condition, or state.
- 9) The Certified Family Support Specialist will promote thoughtful, informed decision-making for those he or she serves in all matters.
- 10) The Certified Family Support Specialist will respect the privacy and confidentiality of those they serve.
- 11) The Certified Family Support Specialist will comply with mandated reporting requirements for abuse and neglect of children and vulnerable adults.
- 12) The Certified Family Support Specialist will promote and support services that foster hope, *resiliency*, and maintenance of a child or youth with mental, emotional, or behavioral health, co-occurring disorders, and/or autism disorder issues in the home, school, and community.
- 13) The Certified Family Support Specialist will be directed by the philosophy that parents and *caregivers* should be equal partners in the treatment of their children.
- 14) The Certified Family Support Specialist will be directed by the knowledge that all individuals

have the right to live and receive services in the least restrictive and least intrusive environment possible.

- 15) The Certified Family Support Specialist will not enter into dual relationships or commitments that conflict with the interests of those they serve.
- 16) The Certified Family Support Specialist will not engage in sexual and/or intimate activities with any individual they serve.
- 17) The Certified Family Support Specialist will not abuse prescription medications or alcohol or use illegal substances under any circumstances.
- 18) The Certified Family Support Specialist will keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to *resiliency, family-driven care*, and child/adolescent issues and will share this knowledge with other Certified Family Support Specialists.
- 19) The Certified Family Support Specialist will not accept gifts of significant value from those that they serve.
- 20) The Certified Family Support Specialist will provide direct *caregiver-to-caregiver* support services as defined by the CFSS Scope of Activities.
- 21) The Certified Family Support Specialist will not provide services, either for employment or on a volunteer basis, without being under the direct supervision of a mental health professional as defined by TDMHSAS Licensure Rules.
- 22) The Certified Family Support Specialist will not provide services beyond their qualifications. This includes diagnosing an illness, prescribing medications, or providing clinical services.
- 23) A Certified Family Support Specialist shall only provide services and support within the hours, days, and locations authorized by the TDMHSAS-approved agency with which they work or volunteer.

APPENDIX A

CADRE PORTAL AND PROGRAM FORMS

CADRE

Career Development For Peer Recovery Specialist

The CADRE Portal is where you will set up your Dashboard for State Certification and Renewal Applications

If you are a current CFSS

1. [Go to CADRE.TN.GOV](https://cadre.tn.gov)
2. Select the “programs” menu at the top
3. Select your certification
4. Click the login button in the upper right corner
5. Your username is the email address you used to sign up for certification
6. Your password is everything in your username up to the @ symbol.

If you are a New Applicant

1. [Go to CADRE.TN.GOV](https://cadre.tn.gov)
2. Select the “applications” tab
3. Select Initial certification
4. Complete the application

Make sure you have all of your documents ready to upload into the system, along with email addresses for your references and supervisor.

Authorization of Support Form

Once the form is completed, please submit it to the TDMHSAS Family Support Specialist Certification Program Via Email at Ffcfss.tdmhsas@tn.gov. If you have questions, please get in touch with the Division of Children and Youth Mental Health at 615-330-5098.

Date: _____

This is to affirm that _____, is granted authority from me, _____ to serve as a surrogate caregiver for my child(ren). In this role, they shall have the authority to advocate within child-serving systems for my child(ren) with *emotional, behavioral, mental health, substance use challenges, co-occurring disorders, and/or autism spectrum disorders*. The surrogate caregiver has permission to represent my child on my behalf at meetings and doctor appointments, sign documents, and make decisions in any/all other situations that require the attention of the custodial parent/caregiver.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please get in touch with me at phone number _____ or email address _____.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Printed Name

Signature

NOTARY ACKNOWLEDGMENT

On _____, _____ appeared before me,
Date Name
_____, a notary public in _____ County of
the State of Tennessee. The signee confirmed that they subscribe to the instrument within and acknowledged that they executed the same.

IN WITNESS of which, I hereunto set my hand and affix my official seal.

Signed, _____

APPENDIX B

FAMILY SUPPORT SPECIALIST CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1) What is a Certified Family Support Specialist?

A Certified Family Support Specialist (CFSS) is a person who has self-identified as the *caregiver* of a child or youth with a *mental, emotional, behavioral, or co-occurring disorder or autism spectrum disorder* and who has successfully navigated the child-serving systems to access treatment and resources necessary to build *resiliency* and foster success in the home, school, and community. This individual has successfully completed training recognized by TDMHSAS on assisting other *caregivers* in fostering *resiliency* in their child based on the principles of *resiliency* and *recovery*.

2) Why are direct “caregiver-to-caregiver” services important?

Caregiver-to-caregiver services are used to assist other *caregivers* of children or youth diagnosed with *mental, emotional, behavioral, co-occurring disorders, autism spectrum disorder* to enhance *resiliency* in youth by providing support, modeling effective advocacy skills, assisting with system navigation, and by offering hope as a *caregiver* who has overcome barriers to parenting a child with an *emotional, behavioral, co-occurring disorder, or autism spectrum disorder*. By providing positive images of *caregivers* of children or youth diagnosed with such disorders, Family Support Specialists can also have a positive impact on the negative attitudes sometimes found among mental health service providers.

3) What is the purpose of the TDMHSAS Family Support Specialist Certification Program?

The Certification Program ensures that individuals who provide direct *caregiver-to-caregiver* support services meet acceptable minimum standards.

4) Who oversees the TDMHSAS Family Support Specialist Certification Program?

The C&Y MH Division develops and administers the policies and procedures for granting certification and recertification within TDMHSAS guidelines, ensuring acceptable professional standards are established.

5) Where can a Certified Family Support Specialist work?

Programs in which Certified Family Support Specialists can be utilized include, but are not limited to, community mental health centers, educational settings, family support centers, juvenile justice settings, crisis stabilization units, case management, psychosocial rehabilitation, advocacy organizations, and inpatient hospital settings, among other children and youth serving systems.

6) What types of services can a Certified Family Support Specialist provide?

Certified Family Support Specialists may provide, but are not limited to, assistance in the development of formal and informal supports, of *strengths-based* family and individual goals, services as an *advocate, mentor, or facilitator* for resolution of issues that a *caregiver* is unable to resolve on their own, or education on system navigation and skills necessary to maintain a child with a *mental, emotional, behavioral, co-occurring disorder, or autism spectrum disorder* in their home environment.

7) Does TDMHSAS provide employment or job placement?

No. TDMHSAS does not offer or guarantee employment or job placement.

8) Who will supervise the Certified Family Support Specialist, and how?

Each Certified Family Support Specialist must be supervised by a mental health professional as defined in the CFSS Employment Guidelines.

9) Where is the Family Support Specialist training offered, and is a fee involved?

For information on recognized trainings, please contact the Division of Children & Youth Mental Health at Ffcfss.tdmhsas@tn.gov.

10) How can provider agencies ensure that Certified Family Support Specialist employees maintain confidentiality?

Maintaining confidentiality and privacy of all individuals receiving services is a legitimate concern and significant issue to emphasize with all employees, not just Certified Family Support Specialist employees.

All employees should receive Title 33 training, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) training, and education on their duty to uphold confidentiality. Every employee should know that all information regarding a person's *recovery* and treatment status is confidential.

11) What is the salary range for a Certified Family Support Specialist?

Many CFSS may work part-time, while some work full-time. The salary range is determined by the hiring agency.

12) I have a post-secondary degree. May I submit a copy of that diploma for my application packet?

Yes. While a post-secondary degree is not required for certification, you may submit a copy of a post-secondary diploma (verification upon request) instead of a high-school diploma or GED.

13) Am I eligible if I am not a parent or primary caregiver of a child or youth diagnosed with a mental, emotional, behavioral, and/or co-occurring disorder and/or autism spectrum disorder?

No. Applicants must be the biological parent (foster, adoptive, or biological), authorized or primary caregiver of a child or youth diagnosed with a mental, emotional, behavioral, or co-occurring disorder *or autism spectrum disorder*.

This is not, in any way, intended to discount the commitment and expertise of others who provide services to children and families. It is, however, intended to recognize that 'lived experience' (coupled with appropriate training and specific competencies) affords individuals serving in this role a perspective that is invaluable in engaging and empowering others.

14) What will happen if the certification requirements change in the future?

In any profession, the requirements for certification change over time. This reflects a new understanding from research and practice about what competencies and training lead to the best outcomes. As changes occur, the CFSS handbook will be updated to reflect any and all changes. Additionally, there may be specific required continuing education courses or topics that you need to complete to renew your certification. Still, these would be announced well in advance and delivered in a manner that ensures they are accessible to you.

15) Can I provide CFSS services on my own, from my home or office?

No. It is a violation of the CFSS Code of Ethics to provide peer services from your own home or office as a private practice. CFSSs are required to work for TDMHSAS-approved agencies. In addition, a CFSS, either for employment or volunteer, must be supervised by a supervisor in accordance with acceptable guidelines and standards of practice as defined by the State (see Supervision section of this handbook)