



# TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

## FAMILY SUPPORT SPECIALIST CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Family Support Specialist Certification Program (FSSCP) provides State certification for individuals who provide direct *caregiver-to-caregiver* support services to families of children and youth with *mental, emotional, behavioral, or co-occurring disorders*. Because of their life experience in caring for children with these disorders and navigating *child-serving systems*, Certified Family Support Specialists (CFSSs) are able to use their unique experience to inspire hope and provide support to others who are facing similar challenges. This program will allow Certified Family Support Specialists to provide a level of service and support beyond that of clinical staff.

The Certified Family Support Specialist can perform a wide range of tasks to assist *caregivers* in managing their child's illness and 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 his or her own, or providing education on system navigation and skills necessary to maintain a child with *emotional, behavioral or co-occurring disorders* in their home environment.

Direct *caregiver-to-caregiver* support services provided by a Certified Family Support Specialist are a vital resource to assist families and others who are caring for children and youth with *emotional, behavioral, or co-occurring disorders*. To achieve the *resiliency* and *recovery* goals of the child and family, the CFSS promotes self-determination, personal responsibility, the skills, knowledge and confidence to be an effective *advocate* for his/her child, and inspires a sense of hope that *resiliency* and *recovery* are achievable goals.

### II. CERTIFIED FAMILY SUPPORT SPECIALIST DEFINITION

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* 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*.

This certification does not in any way indicate that the Certified Family Support Specialist is qualified to diagnosis an illness, to prescribe or provide medication or clinical treatment, or to provide direct *caregiver-to-caregiver* services independent of a TDMHSAS-licensed or otherwise approved agency.

### III. CERTIFICATION ELIGIBILITY

In order for an individual to be eligible for certification, certain qualifications of personal experience, training, employment, and job duties must be met.

- **Personal Experience**

- Self-identify as being or having been the *caregiver/family* member of a child or youth with a *mental, emotional, behavioral, or co-occurring disorder*.
- Personal experience regarding navigating the child-serving systems as the *caregiver/family* member of a child or youth with a *mental, emotional, behavioral or co-occurring disorder*.
- Have actively participated for at least twelve consecutive months at any time during the past five years in service planning, system navigation, and building *resiliency* for a child or youth.
- Have a minimum of six months' work experience (paid and/or volunteer) as a *Family Support Specialist, Support Group Facilitator, Caregiver Educator* and/or *other relevant experience*.

- **Training**

- Completion of the required *evidence-based* and/or *best practice* Family Support Specialist Training Programs currently recognized by TDMHSAS.
- Mastery of *competencies* through testing and evaluation as required by the Family Support Specialist Training Programs, including the Professional Competencies Course, recognized by TDMHSAS.

- **Employment / Volunteer Experience**

- Be under the direct supervision of a *mental health professional* as defined by TDMHSAS.
- Provide direct *caregiver-to-caregiver support* services.

### IV. CFSS EMPLOYMENT GUIDELINES

A CFSS, either employed or volunteer, must be under the direct supervision of a *mental health professional* as defined by TDMHSAS Licensure Rules. A mental health professional as defined by TDMHSAS is a board-eligible or board-certified psychiatrist, or a person with at least a