

Youth Peer Support (YPS) Services Definition

This information was developed based on the Child and Family Treatment and Support Services (CFTSS) Provider Manual. Information was adapted to be more plain language. Please refer to the Provider Manual for more details.

Youth Peer Support (YPS) services are formal and informal services and supports provided to youth, who are experiencing social, medical, emotional, developmental, substance use, and/or behavioral challenges in their home, school, placement, and/or community centered service. These services provide the training and support necessary to ensure engagement and active participation of the youth in the treatment planning process and with the ongoing implementation and reinforcement of skills.

Youth Peer Support activities must be intended to develop and achieve the identified goals and/or objectives as set forth in the youth’s individualized treatment plan.

The structured, scheduled activities provided by this service emphasize the opportunity for the youth to expand the skills and strategies necessary to move forward in meeting their personal, individualized life goals, develop self-advocacy skills, and to support their transition into adulthood. This service is available for children from birth to 21 years of age.

Types of Youth Peer Support (YPS) Services

Skill Building	Support young people to develop skills for wellness, resiliency and recovery including developing goal-setting skills and community living skills. These skills support young people to manage psychiatric symptoms, trauma, and substance use disorders and prepare them to independently navigate service systems.
Coaching	Enhance resiliency and recovery-oriented attitudes in young people by encouraging hope, confidence, and self-efficacy. Promote wellness through modeling and providing mutual support, hope, reassurance and advocacy. YPAs share aspects of their own personal recovery/resiliency story as they feel is appropriate and beneficial for the young person. YPAs may also share their recovery story with caregivers as a means to engage caregivers and help them “see” youth possibilities and hope for their future in a new light.
Engagement, Bridging, and Transition Support	YPAs act as a peer partner as young people transition into different levels of care and into adulthood. They partner with young people and assist families and service providers to help young people understand what to expect, how and why they should be active in developing their treatment plan and to enhance their natural supports.
Self-Advocacy, Self-Efficacy, and Empowerment	Develop, link, and facilitate the use of formal and informal services, including connection to peer support groups in the community. Serve as an advocate, mentor, or facilitator to support the resolution of barriers. YPAs assist in navigating service systems by being a bridge between young people and their service providers during transitions in care. YPAs help young people develop self-advocacy skills in meetings where young people ask for their support. Assist young people in gaining and regaining the ability to make independent choices so that they feel empowered to play a proactive role in their own treatment. Guide young people to effectively communicate their individual perspective to providers and families. Assist young people to develop skills in advocacy so they can advocate for needed services, benefits and seek to effectively resolve their unmet needs. Assist young people in understanding their treatment plans and help to ensure the plan is individualized and reflects the young person’s values and culture.
Community Connections and Natural Supports	Connect young people to community resources and services. The YPA may be asked to accompany a young person to appointments and meetings for the purpose of mentoring and support but not for the sole purpose of providing transportation for the young person. Help young people develop a network for information and support from others who have been through similar experiences, including locating similar interest programs, peer-run programs, and support groups. YPA is encouraged to facilitate and arrange youth peer resiliency/recovery support groups with the support of the agency.

Youth Peer Support (YPS) Services Provider Qualifications

Youth Peer Support is delivered by a New York State Credentialed Youth Peer Advocate (YPA). To be eligible for the YPA Credential, the applicant must:

- Be an individual 18 to 30 years old who has self-identified as a person who has first-hand experience with emotional (mental health), behavioral challenges, and/or co-occurring disorders.
- Be able to use lived experience with a disability, mental illness, or involvement with juvenile justice, special education, substance use disorder, or foster care to assist in supporting youth in their resiliency/recovery and wellness.
- At a minimum, have a high school diploma, high school equivalency or a State Education Commencement Credential. This educational requirement can be waived by the certifying agency if the person has demonstrated competencies and has relevant life experience sufficient for the peer certification.
- Complete Level One (online self-paced) and Level Two (online self-paced and virtual live) components of State approved training for YPAs.
- Submit three letters of reference attesting to proficiency in and suitability for the role of an YPA including one from YPAs supervisor.
- Agree to practice according to the Youth Peer Advocate Code of Ethics.
- Document 600 hours of experience providing Youth Peer Support services.
- Complete 20 hours of continuing education and renew their credential every 2 years.
- Demonstrate qualities of leadership, including:
 - Knowledge of advocacy
 - Group development and/or facilitation of peer-to-peer groups or activities
- Be supervised by a credentialed YPA with three years direct service experience or an individual who meets the criteria for a “qualified mental health staff person” found in 14 NYCRR 591 or 14NYCRR 595.

Definitions

Youth/young person: Individual under age 21

Parent/Family: Family is defined as the primary caregiving unit and is inclusive of the wide diversity of primary caregiving units. Family is a birth, foster, adoptive or self-created unit of people residing together, with significant attachment to the individual, consisting of adult(s) and/or child(ren), with adult(s) performing duties of parenthood/caregiving for the child(ren) even if the individual is living outside of the home.

Service Provider: Individuals/organizations that provide and are paid to provide services to the child/youth and family/caregiver.

Natural Supports: Natural supports are individuals and informal resources that a family/caregiver can access, independent of formal services. These supports are a significant source of culturally relevant emotional support and caring friendships for children and families. Natural supports can be short-term or long-term and are usually sustainable and available to the child and family/caregiver after formal services have ended.