ASSOCIATION OF CHILD LIFE PROFESSIONALS

MESSAGE HANDBOOK

Prepared September 2016
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INTRODUCTION
The Association of Child Life Professionals’ (ACLP) new strategic plan outlined the need to expand public awareness of the importance of child life and to strengthen public perception of the crucial role that Certified Child Life Specialists® play in the lives of children and families.

This message handbook was developed as a tool to help staff, leadership and members of ACLP communicate clearly and consistently about the organization and the value of the child life profession in an effort to expand public awareness of the importance of child life, and to position the Association and its members for greater success as the healthcare system continues to evolve.

It is also intended to be a resource for communicating about ACLP and the child life profession to key stakeholders, including health care decision makers and parents.

The handbook is an internal working document that will continue to evolve. The more consistently we discuss ACLP and the child life profession, the stronger the message and the more successful efforts will be as ACLP continues to grow and awareness of the profession and its value increases.
KEY CONSIDERATIONS

It is important to tailor language used to discuss the Association of Child Life Professionals and the child life profession depending on the target audience you are trying to reach. Below we have outlined key considerations and key points to emphasize when communicating with the various internal and external audiences, including leadership and members, healthcare decision makers, and parents.

- Using “Certified” in front of “Child Life Specialist” is necessary to underscore the training and certification process required for the child life profession.

- Leadership and members prefer to be more detailed and inclusive with language used throughout the messaging, whereas external audiences prefer more direct and individualized language that pertains specifically to their particular needs.

- Research studies and endorsements by other credible professional organizations such as the American Academy of Pediatrics and U.S. News and World Report are very well-received by both internal and external audiences to convey the value of the profession and offering third-party credibility.

- External audiences are interested in the education and training required by the Association.

- The growing field of the child life profession outside the hospital setting is not currently important to healthcare audiences.

- Parents are most interested in their child’s individual needs and the direct benefit that Certified Child Life Specialists will provide.
Overarching Messages
Infants, children, youth, and families benefit from help coping with the stress and uncertainty of illness, injury and treatment.

Certified Child Life Specialists® provide evidence-based, developmentally-appropriate interventions including therapeutic play, preparation and education that support and reduce fear, anxiety and pain for infants, children, youth and families.

Certified Child Life Specialists are educated and trained in the developmental impact of illness and injury. Their role helps improve patient and family care, satisfaction and overall experience.

Child life professionals work and influence care in healthcare and community settings.

The Association of Child Life Professionals ensures a level of competency from Certified Child Life Specialists who provide high-quality and essential patient- and family-centered care.

Detailed Messages
Infants, children, youth and families benefit from help coping with the stress and uncertainty of illness, injury and treatment.

- Infants, children and youth confront a wide variety of stressful and potentially traumatic events that can impact their ability to cope. These experiences related to healthcare can lead to feelings of fear, confusion, loss of control and isolation that can inhibit their development and have negative effects on their physical and emotional health and well-being.

- In both healthcare and community settings, Certified Child Life Specialists® help infants, children, youth, and families cope with the stress and uncertainty of acute and chronic illness, injury, trauma, disability, loss and bereavement.
Certified Child Life Specialists provide evidence-based, developmentally-appropriate interventions including therapeutic play, preparation and education that support and reduce fear, anxiety and pain for infants, children, youth and families.

- Infants, children and youth who engage in therapeutic play with a Certified Child Life Specialist exhibit less emotional distress and increased cooperation and lower negative psychosocial responses.
- Certified Child Life Specialists provide play opportunities to support growth and development.
- Certified Child Life Specialists provide supportive interventions through procedural support, education, preparation, family advocacy and bereavement support.

Certified Child Life Specialists are educated and trained in the developmental impact of illness and injury. Their role helps improve patient and family care, satisfaction and overall experience.

- Leading surveys of the top children’s hospitals as conducted by both U.S. News and World Report and Parent magazine recognize child life as one of the specific variables in determining pediatric quality care.¹
- Studies have found that child life interventions are instrumental in calming children’s fears and result in higher patient satisfaction ratings of the entire care experience.²
- Research suggests child life specialists have a quantifiably positive impact on the care of children in imaging departments. Measures of parent satisfaction, staff satisfaction, child satisfaction, child pain and child distress are shown to be positively impacted.³
- Child life services make a difference in pediatric care. Research and practice have demonstrated that child life services, such as play and preparation, help to contain costs (i.e., reducing the length of stay and decreasing the need for analgesics).⁴,⁵ Observation and consumer satisfaction feedback further confirm the positive effects of child life programs on children and families and staff.
- According to the American Academy of Pediatrics 2014 policy statement on child life services:
  - “Child life services should be delivered as part of an integrated patient- and family-centered model of care and included as a quality indicator in the delivery of services for children and families in healthcare settings.”
  - “Child life programs are recognized as contributing to a culture of patient- and family-centered care as well as to customer satisfaction measures, increasingly important from an incentive-based reimbursement and accreditation standpoint as well as marketing and public reporting of outcomes.”
Child life professionals work and influence care in healthcare and community settings.

- Certified Child Life Specialists work in pediatric in-patient units including critical care units and in outpatient areas including emergency departments, radiology and imaging, specialty care clinics, behavioral and rehabilitation.

- Additionally, child life services are also being offered in other settings such as community outreach programs, private practice, hospice services and home health, camps for children with healthcare needs and private medical and dental practices and services to children of adult patients.

- Internationally, child life services are being offered for children affected by trauma or displacement due to war, human trafficking and natural disasters.

- Child life professionals are serving in administrative roles in hospital and healthcare settings such as development and fundraising, quality and safety, consulting on design and environment, continuous improvement, service excellence, community engagement, alternate care settings, research, academia, patient- and family-centered care and volunteer services.

- Certified Child Life Specialists work in partnership with families, interdisciplinary healthcare teams and community professionals within the evolving healthcare system to meet the psychosocial, emotional and developmental needs of infants, children and youth.

The Association of Child Life Professionals ensures a level of competency from Certified Child Life Specialists who provide high-quality and essential patient- and family-centered care.

- To help ensure patients and families receive high-quality care from Certified Child Life Specialists, the Child Life Certifying Committee administers the examination-based certification program and ongoing certification maintenance.

- All Certified Child Life Specialists have earned a bachelor’s or master’s degree. They also have completed required coursework on the developmental impact of illness and hospitalization and a clinical internship under the supervision of a Certified Child Life Specialist.

- The Association of Child Life Professionals serves the community of Certified Child Life Specialists, faculty, child life assistants and students by supporting the advancement of research, education, training and networking opportunities.

- The Association of Child Life Professionals advances the field of child life by establishing and maintaining professional standards, enhancing the professional growth and development of members, and advancing the credibility of the child life profession by fostering research and promoting the standards of child life practice on a national and international level.
Overarching Messages
Certified Child Life Specialists® provide evidence-based, developmentally- and psychologically-appropriate interventions including therapeutic play, preparation for procedures, and education that support and reduce fear, anxiety and pain for children, adolescents and families.

Certified Child Life Specialists work in partnership with families, interdisciplinary healthcare teams and community professionals within the evolving healthcare system to meet the psychosocial, emotional and developmental needs of children and adolescents.

Certified Child Life Specialists are educated and trained in the development and psychological impact of illness and injury. Their role helps improve outcomes, patient and family satisfaction, and ratings of their overall healthcare experience.

Certification by the Association of Child Life Professionals helps ensure a high level of competency in child life specialists to provide essential patient- and family-centered care.

Value Statement
Coping with illness, injury and treatment is often challenging and stressful for children, adolescents and their families. Certified Child Life Specialists® provide therapeutic play, preparation for procedure, and education that support and reduce fear, anxiety, pain, and suffering for both patients and their families. Studies show these child life services result in cost savings including reduced length of stay, decreased sedation needs and improved family satisfaction and ratings of overall experience. The American Academy of Pediatrics has endorsed the important role of the Certified Child Life Specialist and U.S. News & World Report has recognized that expertise in child life is a vital variable in the success of pediatric care and is counted as a key quality indicator in hospital rankings.
**Detailed Messages**

Certified Child Life Specialists® provide evidence-based, developmentally- and psychologically-appropriate interventions including therapeutic play, preparation for procedures, and education that support and reduce fear, anxiety, pain, and suffering for children, adolescents and their families.

- Children and adolescents who engage in therapeutic play with a Certified Child Life Specialist exhibit less emotional distress and increased cooperation and lower negative psychosocial responses.
- Certified Child Life Specialists provide play opportunities to support growth and development.
- Certified Child Life Specialists provide supportive interventions through procedural support, education, preparation, family advocacy, and bereavement support.

Certified Child Life Specialists work in partnership with families, interdisciplinary healthcare teams and community professionals within the evolving healthcare system to meet the psychosocial, emotional and developmental needs of children and adolescents.

- Certified Child Life Specialists work in pediatric in-patient units including critical care units and in outpatient areas including emergency departments, radiology and imaging, specialty care clinics, behavioral and rehabilitation.

Certified Child Life Specialists are educated and trained in the developmental and psychological impact of illness and injury. Their role helps improve health outcomes, patient and family satisfaction and ratings of overall healthcare experience.

- Leading surveys of the top children’s hospitals as conducted by both *U.S. News and World Report* and *Parent* magazine recognize child life as one of the specific variables in determining pediatric quality care.¹
- Studies have found that child life interventions are instrumental in calming children’s fears and result in higher patient satisfaction ratings of the entire care experience.²
- Research suggests child life specialists have a quantifiably positive impact on the care of children in imaging departments. Measures of parent satisfaction, staff satisfaction, child satisfaction, child pain, and child distress are shown to be positively impacted.³
- Child life services make a difference in pediatric care. Research and practice have demonstrated that child life services, such as play and preparation, help to decrease costs (i.e., reducing the length of stay and decreasing the need for analgesics).⁴⁻⁵ Observation and consumer satisfaction feedback further confirm the positive effects of child life programs on children and families and staff.
- According to the American Academy of Pediatrics 2014 policy statement on child life services:
  - “Child life services should be delivered as part of an integrated patient- and family-centered model of care and included as a quality indicator in the delivery of services for children and families in healthcare settings.”
“Child life programs are recognized as contributing to a culture of patient- and family-centered care as well as to customer satisfaction measures, increasingly important from an incentive-based reimbursement and accreditation standpoint as well as marketing and public reporting of outcomes.”

Certification by the Association of Child Life Professionals helps ensure a high level of competency in child life specialists to provide essential patient- and family-centered care.

- All Certified Child Life Specialists have earned a bachelor’s or master’s degree. They also have completed required coursework on the developmental impact of illness and hospitalization and a clinical internship of at least 480 hours under the supervision of a Certified Child Life Specialist.
- To help ensure patients and families receive high-quality care from Certified Child Life Specialists, the Child Life Certifying Committee administers the examination-based certification program and ongoing certification maintenance.
- The Association of Child Life Professionals serves the community of Certified Child Life Specialists, faculty, child life assistants and students by supporting the advancement of research, education, training and networking opportunities.
- The Association of Child Life Professionals advances the field of child life by establishing and maintaining professional standards, enhancing the professional growth and development of members, and advancing the credibility of the child life profession by fostering research and promoting the standards of child life practice on a national and international level.
**Overarching Messages**
Certified Child Life Specialists® are educated and trained to help your child and family better understand and cope with having an illness or injury. Their role helps to improve your child’s care and treatment, increases satisfaction and leads to a better overall healthcare experience for your entire family.

Certified Child Life Specialists work with everyone who is part of your child’s care team to reduce distress associated with care and treatment and create a more positive experience for your child and family.

Certified Child Life Specialists® provide interventions including therapeutic play, preparation for procedures, and education that support and reduce fear, anxiety, pain, and suffering for children, siblings and families.

Certification by the Association of Child Life Professionals helps ensure a high level of competency in child life specialists to provide essential patient- and family-centered care.

**Value Statement**
Coping with illness, injury and treatment is often challenging and stressful for children, adolescents and their families. Certified Child Life Specialists® provide therapeutic play, preparation for procedures, and education that support and reduce fear, anxiety, pain, and suffering for patients, their siblings and their families. The American Academy of Pediatrics has endorsed the role of the Certified Child Life Specialist and U.S. News & World Report has recognized that expertise in child life is a vital variable in the success of pediatric care and counts it as a key quality indicator in hospital rankings.
Certified Child Life Specialists® are educated and trained to help your child and family better understand and cope with having an illness or injury. Their role helps to improve your child's care and treatment, increases satisfaction and leads to a better overall healthcare experience for your entire family.

- Certified Child Life Specialists provide play opportunities to support growth and development for children and their families when dealing with illness or injury.
- Certified Child Life Specialists provide supportive interventions through procedural support and preparation, education, family advocacy, and bereavement support.

Certified Child Life Specialists work with everyone who is part of your child's care team to reduce distress associated with care and treatment and create a more positive experience for your child and family.

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- Studies have found that child life interventions are instrumental in calming children’s fears and result in higher patient satisfaction ratings of the entire care experience.
- Child life services make a difference in pediatric care. Research and practice have demonstrated that child life services, such as play and preparation, help to decrease costs (i.e., reducing the length of stay and decreasing the need for analgesics). Observation and consumer satisfaction feedback further confirm the positive effects of child life programs on children and families and staff.
- Leading surveys of the top children's hospitals as conducted by both U.S. News and World Report and Parent magazine recognize child life as one of the specific variables in determining pediatric quality care.

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REFERENCES


