



## **ASSOCIATION OF CHILD LIFE PROFESSIONALS POSITION STATEMENT ON CHILD LIFE PRACTICE IN COMMUNITY SETTINGS**

### Introduction

Globally, any individual may confront stressful and potentially traumatic life circumstances. Child life intervention minimizes both the immediate and potential long-term effects of stress, anxiety and psychosocial trauma, ultimately empowering children\*, families and their support systems\*\* to reach their full potential. Child life professionals are uniquely educated and trained to provide children, families and their support systems opportunities to cope, gain a sense of mastery, engage in self-expression and promote resiliency.

Child life was initially established to meet the psychosocial and developmental needs of children in hospitals. Over time, it became clear that the skill set of the child life professional was applicable to other environments in which children are exposed to challenging life events. Child life practice in the community has developed as a result of this awareness, and now promotes optimal development and coping of children, families and their support systems in a wide variety of community environments.

### **I. Rationale for Child Life Practice**

- A. The child life skill set is essential to any environment where children and their families encounter significant life changes, inclusive of typical milestones as well as experiences that negatively impact optimal development.
- B. A vital component of the child life professional's standards of clinical practice is to maintain and increase positive family functioning by advocating for normalization in the environment and the life of the child.
- C. Academic preparation, training and ongoing professional development equip child life professionals with an understanding of the unique perspective of children, families and their support systems and an ability to advocate their needs to others.
- D. The child life professional's expertise in child development is utilized for psychosocial assessment and the provision of preventative and supportive interventions as appropriate.
- E. Therapeutic relationships established between child life professionals and children, families and their support systems create a safe environment that addresses their vulnerability and fosters positive coping, healing and enhanced resiliency.

### **II. Settings**

- A. There is significant value in including child life professionals in a variety of community-based settings. Child life competencies are easily transferred to any professional environment that supports

children, families and their support systems impacted by crisis, challenge or change. There are overarching categories of community-based settings that include private practice, government agencies and community agencies, both for-profit and not-for-profit. Some examples of community agencies, organizations or offices utilizing the unique skill set of the Certified Child Life Specialist (CCLS) include, but are not limited to:

- Adoption Agencies
- Child Advocacy Programs
- Foster Care Agencies
- Judicial System
- Funeral Homes
- Home Health Care
- Hospice and Bereavement Centers
- Medical / Dental Clinics
- Pediatric Medical Homes
- Camps
- Community Support Centers (ex. cancer, grief, etc.)
- Early Intervention Programs
- School Systems
- Crisis Support Service Agencies
- Disaster Relief Services
- Rehab Settings

### III. Essential Goals of Child Life Practice

- A. Assess Coping Responses and Psychosocial Needs of Children, Families and their Support Systems
  1. Gather initial background information to create care plan that reflects respect for development, life experience, and culture.
  2. Regularly review needs and adapt care plans as appropriate.
  3. Continually evaluate effectiveness of interventions and modify accordingly.
- B. Promote Resilience and Minimize Stress and Anxiety by Providing Therapeutic Interventions
  1. Foster a safe and therapeutic relationship characterized by compassion, empathy, respect and an expertise in psychosocial and developmental needs.
  2. Support the child's healthy relationships by:
    - a. involving the child, family and their support system in the care plan
    - b. encouraging normalcy, empowerment and healthy coping strategies
    - c. modeling and educating about optimal attachment
    - d. enhancing child's self-advocacy and communication skills
    - e. cultivating understanding and empathy within siblings and peers

3. Provide developmentally appropriate explanations to the child about the sequence, nature and reasons for life experiences.
4. Provide play opportunities that promote a sense of mastery, optimal development and an understanding of significant life experiences.
5. Engage child in varied activities that facilitate identification and expression of emotions.
6. Facilitate opportunities for interaction, both individually and in groups, with peers experiencing similar life events.
7. Provide opportunities for parent caregivers to actively continue their parenting role.

C. Communicate Effectively with Other Professionals and Community Partners

1. Share expertise regarding the psychosocial and developmental needs of children.
2. Bring unique perspective to the continuum of care for children, families and their support systems while also reflecting an awareness of roles and expertise of other professionals in the community.
3. Document observations and assessments.
4. Communicate and make recommendations to other professionals and community partners based on assessment of child and family variables such as development, life experience, and culture.

IV. Standards for Personnel Certified Child Life Specialist

- A. Eligibility requirements for certification as a child life specialist are set by the Child Life Certification Commission (CLCC). Child life certification fosters uniform and improved standards of practice and ethical conduct and provides a mechanism to protect the public from untrained individuals entering a therapeutic relationship with children, families and their support systems.
- B. Certified Child Life Specialists are exam credentialed professionals that are educationally prepared at the bachelor's degree level or above and have successfully fulfilled the requirements of a clinical internship. In addition, the individual has attained 6000 hours of paid clinical experience as a Certified Child Life Specialist in a healthcare setting. The foundational knowledge and skills obtained in a healthcare environment allow child life professionals to advocate for the needs of children, families and their support systems on a broader scale. This experience helps to equip child life professionals to effectively practice in the community.
- C. Certified Child Life Specialists are qualified to model and demonstrate expertise in:
  - Growth and developmental issues across the lifespan
  - Developmental assessment
  - Play and therapeutic interventions
  - Psychological preparation and preventative support for significant life experiences
  - Children and family responses to stress, trauma and/or significant life experiences

- Interventions to support coping and resiliency
- Family systems
- Interpersonal communication
- Grief and loss
- Cultural humility
- Research and evidence-based practice
- Ethics
- Collaboration with a variety of disciplines
- Program administration and supervision
- Rehabilitation programming

V. Administration of Services

A. Scope of Practice

Child life professionals provide psychosocial support to children, families and their support systems impacted by stress related to significant life experiences. These events could influence typical growth and development and child life professionals aim to minimize the risk of long-term negative effects. Certified Child Life Specialists have a professional obligation to follow the Child Life Certification Commission's Code of Professional Practice which outlines the ethical responsibilities of the professional. Child life professionals will only practice within areas of specialty for which they have received training. When the needs of children, families and their support systems extend beyond the scope of practice, it is the ethical responsibility of the child life professional to make recommendations for and referrals to additional services.

B. Clinical Supervision

Child life professionals value the ethical obligation to receive clinical supervision. As outlined in the Association of Child Life Professional's Position Statement on Clinical Supervision, the essential components of clinical supervision include reflection, collaboration, regularity and competency.

C. Informed Practice

Child life professionals utilize evidence-based practice and promote the completion of substantiating research. In addition, child life professionals practicing in the community pursue ongoing learning in their areas of specialty to ensure best practice standards are maintained within their setting of focus.

D. Professional Development

Child life professionals shall conduct a periodic assessment of the quality and appropriateness of child life services and provide for continuing staff education and development.

E. Accessibility

Child life professionals advocate for equal access to services for individuals of all identities, backgrounds, locations and means.

F. Standard Operating Policies and Procedures

Child life professionals follow policies and procedures as set out by the employing agency or organization. Where appropriate policies and procedures do not exist, child life professionals advocate for their creation to protect the rights and vulnerabilities of children, families and their support systems.

G. Environmental Considerations

Adequate space should be allocated for provision of services in an easily accessible, safe and therapeutic environment. This space should allow for storage of supplies and disinfection of materials. Materials and equipment should be developmentally appropriate to ensure activities promote wellness, foster optimal development and facilitate coping through play and learning opportunities for children, families and their support systems.

\* Refers to infants, children and youth

\*\* Includes family, caregivers and other significant persons in child's life

Approved 2018, Association of Child Life Professionals