



ASSOCIATION OF CHILD LIFE PROFESSIONALS POSITION STATEMENT ON CHILD LIFE PRACTICE FOR CHILDREN OF ADULT PATIENTS

Parents and guardians are hospitalized each year, one of their most common concerns is the wellbeing of their children. The hospital can be a frightening place for children, especially when their parent or guardian is seriously ill or injured (Sutter & Reid, 2012). Child life practice promotes optimal development of children*, families, and their support systems** and reduces the impact of an adult's serious, or life-altering illness or injury on the children in their life. Any individual may confront stressful and potentially traumatic healthcare circumstances. Evidence indicates that children and families of adults with a serious or life-altering illness or injury are particularly at risk. Child life professionals are uniquely educated and trained to provide children, families and their support systems with opportunities to cope, gain a sense of mastery, engage in self-expression and promote resiliency. Child life practice minimizes both the immediate and long-term effects of stress, anxiety and psychosocial trauma, ultimately empowering children, families and their support systems to reach their full potential.

I. Rationale

- The impact of an adult's life-altering illness or injury can interfere with a caregiver's ability to support and communicate with the child; thus, the child life professional's expertise is utilized to empower caregivers to effectively support the child, both psychosocially and emotionally.
- The child life skill set is essential to any environment where an adult's life-altering illness or injury may cause disruption to the child's typical growth and development as well as to family roles and functioning.
- 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.
- 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.
- The child life professional's expertise in child development is utilized for psychosocial assessment and the provision of preventative and supportive interventions as appropriate.
- Therapeutic relationships established between child life professionals and children, families and their support systems create a safe environment that addresses their vulnerability and fosters coping, healing and enhanced resiliency.

II. Settings

There is significant value in including child life professionals in a variety of settings supporting adults with serious or life-altering illness or injury. 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 settings that support children of adults with serious or life-altering illness or injury that utilize the unique skill set of child life professionals. These include but are not limited to:

- Adult Facilities (ex: medical hospitals and clinics, rehabilitation facilities)
- Home Health Care
- Community Centers (i.e. cancer support centers, grief support centers)
- Hospice Agencies
- Bereavement Centers
- Palliative Care
- Funeral Homes
- Schools
- Camps

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 for Children, Families and Their Support Systems:

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 appropriate behaviors and educating involved individuals about the unique needs of the child when an adult faces serious illness or injury
 - d. enhancing the child's self-advocacy and communication skills
 - e. cultivating understanding and empathy
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 the 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.

C. Communicate Effectively with Other Professionals

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 and reflecting an awareness of roles and expertise of other professionals.
3. Document observations and assessments.
4. Communicate and make recommendations to other professionals as needed based on assessment of child and family variables such as development, life experience, and culture.

IV. Standards for Personnel

Certified Child Life Specialist

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 infants, children, youth and families.

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 traditional pediatric healthcare setting. This level of professional experience equips child life professionals to effectively practice in settings that support adults with serious or life-altering illness or injury. 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.

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

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 a setting supporting adults with a serious or life-altering illness or injury 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 healthcare 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

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Sutter, C., & Reid, T. (2012). How do we talk to the children? Child life consultation to support the children of seriously ill adult inpatients. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, 15(12), 1362-1368. doi:10.1089/jpm.2012.0019