



THE ASSOCIATION OF CHILD LIFE PROFESSIONALS POSITION STATEMENT ON EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE POSITION STATEMENT

Evidence-based practice is a general application of the term “evidence-based medicine,” which according to Sackett and colleagues (1996) is “the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients.”¹ (p.71) Child life professionals recognize that in child life practice it is essential to integrate research evidence with professional expertise and patient preferences when making clinical decisions. Identifying and synthesizing different perspectives and types of evidence ensures that child life specialists adhere to the ethical guidelines on which the profession was founded by fulfilling the responsibility to practice responsibly. Evidence-based practice then becomes both a method and a philosophy that guides both clinical and research pursuits, ensuring high quality services for patients and families that promote positive outcomes.

Evidence based practice is an ideology applicable to and accessible by professionals of all backgrounds and levels of expertise. It is a principle that guides clinical decision making by stressing the importance of looking to multiple forms of evidence – internal and external, academic and experiential. It is not a technique for conducting research, but rather emphasizes evaluating and considering empirically collected evidence in daily practice. Looking to empirical evidence provides concrete information about the service methods or interventions associated with the greatest benefits for patients and families, thus further improving their abilities to cope with the difficulties of hospitalization, illness, or medical treatment. Then, the evidence gathered in these same pursuits can be utilized to educate child life students, interns, and other future child life specialists to simultaneously create a reciprocal cycle of lifelong learning among the child life community.

Evidence-based practice not only directly improves child life services for patients and families, but enhances the role of the child life specialist as a member of the interdisciplinary care team. Since evidence-based practice is a commonality shared by healthcare disciplines, it allows for child life specialists to integrate evidence from other disciplines to create a more unified perspective and reliable knowledge base for policy development and quality improvement. Furthermore, practical application of evidence-based practice within child life diminishes biases based on personal or single institution viewpoints and unites the child life profession as a whole under a shared focus on providing the best interventions and services available for patients and families. Appraising, disseminating, and implementing research evidence empowers child life specialists to educate staff and gain validation for interventions and services to improve collaboration as interdisciplinary care team members. In addition, child life professionals recognize that utilizing research evidence contributes to their abilities to advocate and secure funding for child life services and interventions in both new and existing areas – whether they be alternative settings, new hospitals or institutions, or new units within a hospital or practice. Once a solid foundation of evidence for child life services has been organized and established, child life specialists can more easily translate their services and abilities to additional populations where services are needed, therefore increasing the potential for growth of the child life profession.

The child life profession acknowledges that evidence-based practice is a principle that guides clinical practice by asserting the important roles that empirical evidence, practitioner expertise, and patient preferences play in decision making and treatment planning. It is a philosophy that will solidify child life practitioners as an integral part of healthcare teams and a core component contributing to patient- and family-centered care. By adopting and adhering to the philosophy of evidence-based practice, child life professionals will ensure optimal developmental and psychosocial outcomes for patients and families, will guarantee high quality clinical care that is continually improved upon, and will construct a comprehensive foundation of evidence that will inform this profession for decades to come.

Written by CLC: September 2010

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1 Sackett, D.L., Rosenberg, W.M., Muir Gray, J.A., Haynes, R.B., & Richardson, W.S. (1996). Evidence based medicine: What it is and what it isn't. *BMJ*, 12, 71-72.