THE VALUE OF THE CERTIFICATION CREDENTIAL IN CHILD LIFE SERVICES

I. The Child Life Profession

A. The profession of child life exists to promote optimal development of infants, children, youth and family members and to minimize psychological trauma in children facing a broad range of challenging experiences, particularly related to health care and hospitalization. The American Academy of Pediatrics affirms that child life is “an essential component of quality pediatric health care,” and as such, child life services have become a standard in most pediatric hospital settings. (American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Hospital Care. (2006) Child life services. Pediatrics, 106, 1156-1159)

B. Professionals in child life have expertise in helping children and their families overcome life’s most challenging events. Using play and psychological preparation as primary tools, child life interventions facilitate coping and adjustment at times and under circumstances that might otherwise prove overwhelming to children and families. The primary roles of a child life professional include:

1. Enhance the adjustment of children and families to health care experiences and other difficult life encounters using play and a variety of therapeutic techniques.

2. Prepare children both cognitively and emotionally for medical and other demanding life events in language they can understand and in a manner which helps to alleviate anxiety and stress.

3. Teach coping skills, including distraction techniques and relaxation exercises, to reduce the potential for negative reactions to health care experiences and other life distresses.

4. Assess, monitor and enhance developmental skills across the life continuum, especially for children and youth who are exposed to situations which put them at risk for developmental interruption, such as hospitalization and chronic illness.

C. Through the provision of these services, child life improves the health care experience for pediatric patients and their families, reduces stress and uncertainty, and helps create an environment in which medical services can be delivered more smoothly and efficiently.

II. Standards of Practice for Child Life

A. The primary professional association for child life is the Child Life Council (CLC). CLC is an international organization that represents the profession of child life, and has an established mission, values, standards of clinical practice and a code of ethics for the profession. The standards of clinical practice include:

1. Promote psychosocial care at the highest professional level

2. Define the function of child life services

3. Establish professional expectations for the administration and implementation of child life services
4. Provide guidance for organizations and individuals in developing child life programs and services

III. Credentialing of Child Life Specialists

A. Professional expertise and skills in the practice of child life are achieved through a certification process overseen by the Child Life Council. This process involves confirmation of educational qualifications, clinical internship training, work experience and the successful completion of an evidence-based written examination specifically developed to assess the readiness of an individual to enter the profession of child life. The Certified Child Life Specialist (CCLS) is achieved upon successful completion of these activities. Certified Child Life Specialists are required to undertake continuing professional development activities to maintain their CCLS credential.

IV. Employing Certified Child Life Specialists

A. As the profession of child life has become more defined and specialized, and as the responsibilities of the practitioners have become more demanding, it is increasingly important for those practicing child life to attain an acceptable level of both knowledge and clinical training. The Child Life Council believes that the education and training of those who achieve the credential of Certified Child Life Specialist provides the practitioner with the knowledge and skill sets to practice child life at a professional level. Those individuals who attain Certified Child Life Specialist status are able to provide accurate assessments, interventions and evaluations of children and families. The provision of child life services by Certified Child Life Specialists is a quality benchmark of an integrated child health delivery system and an indicator of excellence in pediatric care. Ultimately the only method for assuring both employers and patients/families that the highest standards of practice in child life will be addressed is the utilization of Certified Child Life Specialists.

B. To ensure quality child life service provision, it is the position of the Child Life Council, Inc., that child life services should be provided by Certified Child Life Specialists.