



The Value of the Certification Credential in the Provision of Child Life Services

Background of the Child Life Profession

In both healthcare and community settings, Certified Child Life Specialists (CCLSs) help infants, children, youth, and families cope with the stress and uncertainty of acute and chronic illness, injury, trauma, disability, and loss and bereavement. They provide evidence-based, developmentally and psychologically appropriate interventions including therapeutic play, preparation for procedures, and education to reduce fear, anxiety, and pain. 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, 2014).

Goals of Child Life Services to Benefit Children and Families

- Enhanced adjustment to health care and other difficult life experiences through play and a variety of therapeutic techniques (Diener et al., 2018; Frereday & Darbyshire; 2008; Shea, Robertson, Rylatt, & Gibbs, 2019).
- Cognitive and emotional preparedness for healthcare experiences and other challenging life events (Gursky, Kestler, & Lewis, 2010; Hall et al., 2018; Scott et al., 2016).
- Communication that promotes understanding and coping (Kossoff, Sutter, Doerrer, Haney, & Turner, 2017; Scott et al., 2016).
- Reduction of negative reactions to healthcare experiences and other life distresses through the use of coping skills, including distraction and relaxation techniques (Burns-Nader, Joe, & Pinion, 2017; Gursky, Kestler, & Lewis, 2010).
- Reduced risk for developmental interruption during healthcare experiences and other challenging life events (LeBlanc, Naugler, Morrison, Parker, & Chambers, 2014).

In summary, CCLSs improve experiences for children and their families in circumstances that might otherwise prove overwhelming by reducing stress and uncertainty and promoting positive coping.

The Credentialing Body of the Certified Child Life Specialist

The Child Life Certification Commission (CLCC) holds responsibility for decision-making over all essential certification activities, in line with standards set by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCAA), a subsidiary of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE, 2014). The Certified Child Life Specialist (CCLS) designation is the only credential for the child life profession.

The Importance of Credentialing Child Life Professionals

- Child life certification fosters uniform and improved standards of practice and ethical conduct.
- Child life certification provides a mechanism to protect the general public from untrained individuals entering a therapeutic relationship with infants, children, youth, and families.
- Child life certification validates professional knowledge and provides a sense of professional pride and achievement.
- Child life recertification requires that professionals who exhibit the capacity to perform at the entry level through initial certification maintain current knowledge and standards in the field and demonstrate a commitment to continued professional growth.

The Child Life Credentialing Process

Certification is a process by which a non-governmental agency or association grants recognition to an individual who has met predetermined qualifications specified by that association or agency.

CLCC oversees the credentialing process for child life specialists and has primary responsibility for decision-making relevant to essential certification matters.

Through a rigorous, exam-based certification process specifically developed to assess the readiness of an individual to enter the child life profession, CCLSs demonstrate mastery of essential child life concepts. Prior to the examination, certification candidates must meet academic and clinical requirements, which are continually reviewed and revised to reflect current child life practice.

ACLP and CLCC maintain that these achievements are essential to the development of a competent child life services provider, and the Child Life Professional Certification Exam is the mechanism through which CCLSs demonstrate their mastery of essential child life concepts.

CCLSs must recertify every 5 years by retaking the certification exam or through the accrual of Professional Development Units to retain certification. Recertification requirements are routinely reviewed and revised to advance the continuing competence of credential holders.

Certification fosters uniform and improved standards of practice and ethical conduct. The behavior of CCLSs is subject to scrutiny by the CLCC Ethics Committee, which has the authority to investigate complaints, determine if violation of the Child Life Code of Ethics occurred, and apply sanctions when appropriate.

Employing Certified Child Life Specialists

Child life services are critical for the emotional safety of a vulnerable population. Additionally, child life practice has become more clearly defined and specialized, and the responsibilities of practitioners are demanding and complex. This makes it essential for those providing child life services to meet a standard of knowledge and skills. The education and training requirements for the CCLS credential are designed to prepare candidates with the knowledge and skills to practice child life at a professional level.

CCLSs are uniquely qualified to make accurate child life assessments, implement individualized interventions, and evaluate the plan of care. According to the AAP (2014), the provision of child life services by CCLSs 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 met is the employment of CCLSs. Therefore, it is the position of ACLP that child life services be provided by Certified Child Life Specialists.

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