

VOLUNTEER/WORK EXPERIENCE

Where can I gain Pre-Internship Experiences? *Due to the competitive nature of the field, many students choose to diversify their applications with paid and unpaid experiences. There are many different areas where you can gain knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience:*

- ACLP Pre-Internship Modules
- Volunteer & Work Experiences
- Child Life Practicum

**ACLP recognizes that practicums have become a barrier within the pathway to the child life profession. Pre-internship experiences are not required by the Child Life Certification Commission, and ACLP does not endorse practicums or other pre-internship programs. These modules are designed for sites and learners who may find them supportive.*

The common child life internship application asks you to list your experiences working with children/families in healthcare settings, in stressful situations, and with well children and/or families. Consider this when deciding where to gain experience. Experiences should be diverse (e.g. different settings, age groups, your role, etc.) as well as thorough in the amount of time spent. For instance, many different short-term experiences would reflect diversity, but not necessarily a large amount of time that would allow you to gain a deep understanding of the children and families with whom you worked.

Do I need to volunteer in a program where I am supervised by a child life specialist? *Possibly. It is your responsibility to clarify the specific expectations and application requirements of each child life practicum, clinical internship, and academic program.*

ACADEMICS

Are there specific academic courses I need to take?

Yes, there are ten required courses, in addition to a bachelor's or master's degree. (see this link for course specifics: <https://www.childlife.org/docs/default-source/certification/2019-eligibility-details.pdf>)

- Child life course taught by a CCLS
- A minimum of 2 child development courses that cover ages birth -18
- Family systems course
- Play course
- Loss/bereavement or death/dying course
- Research course
- 3 additional courses in related content areas

Students graduating from an endorsed program during the period of endorsement will still need to complete an eligibility assessment with ACLP, but will not need to have each course reviewed as endorsement signifies inclusion of all areas of the coursework requirements.

This means students graduating from an endorsed program during the period of endorsement have the assurance that their coursework satisfies the coursework requirements for exam eligibility that went into effect in 2019. Students graduating from an ACLP-Endorsed Academic Program will meet the coursework requirements for exam eligibility through their degree plan.

Is there a certain order in which the required courses need to be taken?

No. Courses can be taken in any order.

Where can I take the required courses?

The courses that are required must be taken for credit and appear with a passing grade on an official transcript from an academic institution that has been accredited by an organization recognized by either the US Department of Education or the Council on Higher Education Accreditation. .

Are there online options to take the required courses?

Yes. In the Certification Resources section of the ACLP website, you can find a list of academic institutions offering child life courses. This information is self-reported by the academic institution and may not be comprehensive or up-to-date. See that resource [here](#).

Do all of the courses need to be completed before I apply for an internship?

Generally speaking, most internships prefer that most of the courses are already completed or are in progress. Some internships may require that all minimally required coursework be completed at the time of application. This is a great question to ask when inquiring about individual internships.

I'm wondering if a certain class will count.

For any course which you are uncertain about meeting requirements, check the most recent requirements from the ACLP [here](#), and submit documentation for the course to be reviewed through the Eligibility Assessment [here](#). Please note that only courses that have been completed will be reviewed. To determine if a course may meet the requirements share the [details](#) of the requirements with your academic advisor or instructor. If you are seeking assurance that a course you hope to take will be accepted, please see the list of [pre-approved courses](#).

How do I find a course taught by a Certified Child Life Specialist?

In the Certification Resources section of the ACLP website, you can find a list of programs offering coursework taught by a CCLS. This information is self-reported by the academic institution and may not be comprehensive or up-to-date. See that resource [here](#).

How recently do I need to have taken the courses?

As long as the coursework you have completed [meets the requirements](#) of the ACLP, it does not matter when the course was taken. You will be required to submit official transcripts for the Eligibility Assessment.

In what should I major?

The degree that you earn may be in any field of study. However, the individual coursework that you have taken must fulfill the requirements set forth by the ACLP.

What if I don't have a degree in child life?

A degree in child life is not required for certification. A minimum of a bachelor's degree is required; it may be in any field of study. There are specific courses that must be completed either as part of the degree program or in addition to it. The curriculum for certain degrees will align more closely than others. For instance, a degree in Early Childhood Education will align more closely than a degree in Electrical Engineering. The [Eligibility Assessment](#) will determine if your completed coursework meets the ACLP requirements or if additional coursework will be required.

What does it mean to be affiliated with a university?

"Affiliated" and "unaffiliated/independent" are terms used to describe the connection with universities or colleges. Many healthcare facilities mandate that a legal agreement (an affiliation agreement or contract) must be in place before accepting a student or before a student begins the child life practicum or internship. University affiliation means that a student is either taking at least one class from a university, or it could mean that the student is full-time and/or degree-seeking. Students who are not affiliated with a university or college are often referred to as "independent." Most independent students are required to obtain personal liability insurance and a few institutions also require workman's compensation coverage. These requirements are usually shared on the websites of individual institutions.

What is an affiliation agreement?

A contract between the university (on behalf of the intern) and the legal department of the internship site designating who is responsible for certain legal coverage of the students. Hospitals often require this so that the university will provide liability insurance coverage for the student while they are on hospital property and are still students.

How long does it take to get an affiliation agreement?

This can depend on the communication between the university and hospital staff who are working together to complete the agreement. This can go more quickly if other students from your school have already completed internships at the same facility. A student usually does not take part in this process but can make inquiries into how the process is going. An internship for an individual student may not begin until the affiliation agreement is complete.

What do I do if an affiliation agreement doesn't exist between my internship site and my school?

If this is the case, the internship site and the school will need to work on establishing and executing an agreement.

Do unaffiliated/independent students need affiliation agreements?

Unaffiliated students are often referred to as "independent" and they also require affiliation agreements. In this case, the agreement (contract) is directly between the healthcare institution and the student. Unaffiliated students are often required to obtain personal liability insurance and a few institutions also require workman's compensation coverage. These requirements are usually shared on the websites of individual institutions.

Do all programs accept affiliated and unaffiliated/independent students?

No. It is best to find this information on individual program's websites. It is unprofessional to ask for an exception to a program's stated policy.

How do I know if my university is complying with ACLP requirements?

There are several [ACLP endorsed academic programs](#). Endorsed programs have completed a comprehensive review process and meet all ACLP academic requirements. Programs are endorsed for a period of five years. Many other academic programs have had their [courses pre-approved by the ACLP](#). You can learn more about endorsement and course pre-approval on the ACLP website. Once pre-approved, course pre-approval stands for two academic years.

Are my degree requirements the same as the ACLP course requirements for certification?

Completing an Eligibility Assessment is required in order to take the certification exam. The [Eligibility Assessment](#) determines where your prior coursework may meet the ACLP course requirements.

Should I get a master's degree?

While obtaining a master's degree might make you a more competitive applicant for internships, and jobs, it is not currently required for certification. However, many institutions do require a master's degree to hold a leadership position.

CHILD LIFE PRACTICUM

Is a child life practicum required for certification eligibility?

No. While a child life practicum is not required by the ACLP, some hospitals have added the child life practicum to their minimum requirements in order to apply for internships. The child life practicum is one pre-internship experience that will likely expose you to experiences and opportunities that will make you more prepared and competitive for an internship. There are core knowledge bases and professional skills developed during a child life practicum that will better prepare you to succeed during an internship.

Do work or volunteer hours count as a child life practicum?

No. Volunteer and work experiences are important and another example of a pre-internship experience, but only child life practicums that are defined as such may be considered when practicum is an experience under the supervision of a Certified Child Life Specialist structured to help students connect academic knowledge and theory to the clinical setting.

Can I complete a child life practicum after my internship?

No. The child life practicum is primarily observational yet supervised and supported with guidance from a Certified Child Life Specialist, with the goals of experiencing child life practice firsthand and observing child development theory put into practice in the clinical setting. The child life internship is a hands-on clinical experience with the goal of developing the skills needed for effective child life practice. Interns are empowered by their Certified Child Life

Specialist supervisors to apply academic and theoretical knowledge to practice in real-world settings. Interns are prepared to do the work of a professional child life specialist, pass the certification exam, and establish minimum professional competence.

Is someone available to look over my resume and application before I apply?

It is wise to proofread your resume, cover letter, and application before submitting these items to an internship program. Please be selective when seeking feedback. Consider utilizing the writing center and career services office at your academic institution, your academic advisor, a trusted professional, a person whose writing skills you admire or respect, etc. While you may find people online or on social media who are willing to help, they may not have any additional expertise to qualify them to do so and it certainly isn't necessary to pay someone for this service. Use your best judgement and consider using resources that are already available to you.

ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENT

What is an Eligibility Assessment?

An [Eligibility Assessment](#) is a process through which ACLP determines eligibility to sit for the certification exam by reviewing the applicant's experiences in relation to the requirements (degrees, coursework, and internship) . Think of the Eligibility Assessment as a virtual filing cabinet. There is a one-time \$80 fee, and the assessment can be completed all at once or over time.*

**If the eligibility requirements change before eligibility has been established, applicants may be required to resubmit a fee for a new eligibility assessment.*

Is an Eligibility Assessment required when applying for internships?

Not necessarily. Each individual internship program determines if they require the [Eligibility Assessment](#) from applicants. Internships accredited by the ACLP will likely require you to submit your Eligibility Assessment report with your application. The [Eligibility Assessment](#) is required for an individual to be seated for the certification exam.

CLINICAL INTERNSHIP

What does it mean for an internship program to be accredited?

Many child life internship programs have completed a rigorous and robust accreditation process. Accredited internship programs meet the minimum standards and requirements established for clinical preparation programs in child life in the most current Official Documents of ACLP as well as the [Child Life Clinical Internship Learning Modules](#). Accreditation is a voluntary two-step process of self-study and external review intended to evaluate, enhance, and publicly recognize quality child life clinical internship programs, promoting the interests of students and the child life profession as a whole through continuous quality improvement of learning and professional practice. You can learn more about the internship accreditation process [here](#).

Do I need to be a current student to get an internship?

Not necessarily. You will need to check with the individual internship site in order to find out if that site allows independent interns or requires interns to be affiliated with a university.

Will I need to relocate to complete an internship?

Possibly. Applicants must decide on their own what will work for their lives and schedules when applying for internships. Some applicants only apply to local hospitals, and some will apply to many different hospitals across the country (or world). Applying to more places might mean having more opportunities to obtain an interview or internship offer, but it may also mean needing to uproot, travel, find housing, and be away from home, often at your own expense. Applying to local hospitals only will limit your opportunities, but ensure that you only receive interviews or offers from those hospitals. Each applicant must take some time to weigh options and decide if relocating for an internship is realistic.

Do internships offer housing?

Not necessarily. Most internship sites do not offer housing. This would be a great question to ask during the interview process to determine if accepting the internship would be feasible for you.

Do I get paid for my internship?

Typically, no; however, there may be a few programs that offer a stipend or scholarship.

Can I work while completing an internship?

Maybe, but it is not advisable. You will most likely not be able to work in the hospital that you are completing your internship, as it could present a conflict between your roles. Keep in mind that most internships will be a full-time commitment (40 hours on-site) and likely involve more hours outside of the internship to complete assignments. Adding a work schedule to this already heavy load could be problematic. Some hospitals may require that you do not have a paid job while you are an intern.

Can I complete an internship part time?

The ACLP requires a 600-hour internship, which is typically completed over 15-16 weeks, at 40 hours per week; however, each internship site will determine their exact schedule.

Are there scholarships for internships?

Yes. The ACLP has information on applying for the Diversity Scholarships [here](#). There are also several child life regional groups that offer child life internships which are advertised on the regional group's website and social media pages.

How do I make myself more competitive when applying for a child life internship?

Hospitals look at a wide variety of factors when selecting an intern, which can include: degree(s) earned, volunteer experience, work experience, and healthcare experience. They also pay close attention to written sources, such as responses to questions, cover letters, and

resumes. In addition, reference forms and letters of recommendation are also taken into consideration. It is important to prepare carefully, reflect, and revise as needed to demonstrate well-developed professional and communication skills. Because the requirements for internship posted by clinical sites are the **minimum** expectations, more competitive applicants will demonstrate that they surpass the minimum requirements. In addition to application materials reflecting relevant experiences, applicants who can accurately and thoroughly articulate what they have learned will tend to stand out.

I have many years of experience working with children, do I need to complete the internship?

Yes. The child life internship is a structured program that establishes competency in both knowledge and skills for emerging child life specialists. In addition, a 600+ hour child life internship supervised by a Certified Child Life Specialist is required to be eligible to sit for the Child Life Professional Certification Exam.

Are internships available in alternative settings?

Perhaps, but it is rare. Most internships take place in the hospital setting. To be eligible to supervise internship hours, a CCLS must:

1. Maintain professional child life certification throughout the supervisory period
2. Have a minimum of 4,000 hours of paid child life clinical experience prior to the start of the supervisory period
3. Take responsibility for the educational development and guidance of the candidate in the clinical setting

Do internship programs look at GPA?

Yes. Many programs have a minimum requirement for GPA.

How competitive is it to get an internship?

You can expect this process to be highly competitive. Most internship sites receive many applications from qualified intern applicants, and applicants can increase their chances of being selected by having complete and polished application materials reflecting a depth of knowledge and experience, as well as practicing interview skills.

What happens if I don't get an internship?

This can happen and is a part of the process for many. However, successful completion of an internship is required for certification, therefore, you will need to re-apply for a future internship opportunity. Asking for feedback from internship sites can help you make important adjustments and improvements for future application and interview processes, while understanding that not all internship sites are able to provide you with feedback.

Is an internship required to graduate from an academic program?

This depends on the graduation requirements for your specific academic institution. Please follow up with your academic advisor for clarification.

Is someone available to look over my resume and application before I apply?

It is wise to proofread your resume, cover letter, and application before submitting these items to an internship program. Please be selective when seeking feedback. Consider utilizing the writing center and career services office your academic institution, your academic advisor, a trusted professional, a person whose writing skills you admire or respect, etc. While you may find people online or on social media who are willing to help, they may not have any additional expertise to qualify them to do so and it certainly isn't necessary to pay someone for this service. Use your best judgement and consider using resources that are already available to you.

CERTIFICATION

Do I need to be certified in order to get a job as a child life specialist?

Most employers require certification. However, some hospitals allow applicants to become certified within a specified amount of time provided they have established eligibility for the certification exam.

When can I take the certification exam?

After successfully submitting documentation of required coursework, degree completion, and clinical experience (internship) through an [eligibility assessment](#), you will be able to apply to sit for the exam. The exam is offered three times each year in March, August, and November. Each of these testing windows has a corresponding registration deadline. For more information about dates and deadlines, please click [here](#).

What resources does ACLP offer to help me pass the child life certification exam?

The ACLP has [resources](#) devoted to helping you prepare for the exam.

How do you maintain the credential and recertify?

Upon passing the certification exam, the individual is granted certification for a 5-year period contingent on the payment of certification [maintenance fees](#). In the fifth year of the cycle, recertification is due. The recertification process requires Certified Child Life Specialists to document knowledge and skill improvement and enhancement in order to support continuing competence. Certified Child Life Specialists may recertify by either retaking the exam or through the accrual of Professional Development Units.. Click [here](#) to learn more.

What is the difference between a child life specialist and a child life assistant?

Child life specialist is a position that generally requires certification (Certified Child Life Specialist) and this person has the necessary qualifications to provide clinical care directly to patients. This includes assessments, preparation, and interventions. A child life assistant, sometimes called an activity coordinator, is a position that does not require certification and generally does the non-clinical work within a child life department. This can include providing age-appropriate play, playroom management, volunteer supervision, ordering, coordinating donations, working with special visitors, and other important responsibilities.