



Child Life:

Empowering Children and Families

Children today confront a wide variety of stressful and potentially traumatic events that can overwhelm their natural ability to cope and heal. Experiences related to health care and hospitalization can lead to feelings of fear, confusion, loss of control, and isolation that can inhibit their natural development and have negative effects on their physical and emotional health.

Child life specialists are trained professionals who help children cope with the stress and uncertainty of illness, injury, disability, and hospitalization.



WHAT IS A CHILD LIFE SPECIALIST?

Child life specialists are child development experts who work to ensure that life remains as normal as possible for children in health care settings and other challenging environments. They promote effective coping through play, self-expression activities, and age-appropriate medical preparation and education. As advocates of family-centered care, child life specialists work in partnership with doctors, nurses, social workers and others to meet the unique emotional, developmental and cultural needs of each child and family.

Child life specialists work in general pediatric inpatient units, and often in specialty areas like the emergency department, surgical and intensive care units, and outpatient areas. Increasingly, child life services are also being offered in other settings, such as community outreach programs, private medical and dental practices, and special needs camps.

SERVICES PROVIDED BY CHILD LIFE SPECIALISTS

Child life specialists focus on the psychosocial and developmental needs of children, collaborating with families and other health care providers to:

- Prepare children for medical procedures or treatment using language that children understand
- Introduce coping strategies to help reduce anxiety and enhance cooperation with the health care team
- Provide support and distraction during medical procedures
- Offer opportunities for play and expressive activities, to encourage normal development and a sense of FUN in spite of challenging circumstances
- Promote family-centered care by providing information, advocacy and support to families of pediatric patients



PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

Child life specialists have earned a bachelor's or master's degree with an educational emphasis on human growth and development or a related field of study. They adhere to a code of ethics and standards established by the Association of Child Life Professionals, a professional organization which also administers the rigorous process for obtaining the Certified Child Life Specialist (CCLS) credential. All Certified Child Life Specialists must complete a supervised clinical internship, pass an examination, and adhere to standards for continuing professional development in order to maintain their certification.

RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT . . .

- Children who are prepared for medical procedures experience less fear and anxiety, and will have better long term adjustment to medical challenges.
- Children in the hospital who engage in therapeutic play with a trained professional exhibit less emotional distress, increased cooperation, and fewer negative physiological responses.
- Child life interventions can increase cooperation and help to reduce procedural and post-procedural pain.
- Providing support for family members enhances psychosocial outcomes for young patients. A parent or caregiver's behavior and anxiety levels are strongly correlated with how a child will respond to hospitalization.



NEED MORE INFORMATION?

If you are interested in obtaining child life services for your child and family, ask your physician or a health care administrator if child life services are available. For more information on the child life profession, please visit the Association of Child Life Professionals website at www.childlife.org.

ABOUT THE ASSOCIATION OF CHILD LIFE PROFESSIONALS

The Association of Child Life Professionals is a non-profit organization that advances the well-being of children and families by promoting effective, quality child life services in health care environments. ACLP organizes professional development opportunities for child life specialists, facilitates the exchange of knowledge and resources, and monitors the latest research and developments relevant to the child life profession. Through the administration of a professional credentialing program, ACLP ensures a standard of quality and performance among those who have earned the Certified Child Life Specialist (CCLS) designation.

Association of Child Life Professionals
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