



How Do I Become a Child Life Specialist?

Navigating Joining the Field



What is a Child Life Specialist?

According to the Association of Child Life Professionals (ACLP),

“Certified Child Life Specialists are educated and clinically trained in the developmental impact of illness and injury. Their role helps improve patient and family care, satisfaction, and overall experience. In both healthcare and community settings, Certified Child Life Specialists help infants, children, youth and families cope with the stress and uncertainty of acute and chronic illness, injury, trauma, disability, 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.”

What are the requirements to become certified?

- Volunteering or working with children in three areas: well/healthy children, hospitalized children), and children in stressful situations.
- 10 child life courses required for eligibility by ACLP ([See which courses are required here](#))
- Practicum (not officially required but highly suggested)
- 600-hour clinical Internship
- A bachelor's degree (preferably in a related field like child development, family studies, psychology, etc.)
- Pass the certification exam

Experience with Children

Child life specialists have a strong foundation of child development, so gaining lots of experience with children is crucial! Before you apply for practicums or internships, many sites require having a minimum number of volunteering hours. Sites also may look for a variety of experiences, so try to work with well children, volunteer with children in the hospital, or with children in other stressful settings to widen your experiences.

10 Courses Required by the ACLP

- 1 Child life course taught by a CCLS
- 2 child development courses
- 1 Family systems course
- 1 Play course
- 1 Loss/bereavement or death/dying course
- 1 Research course
- 3 additional courses in related areas

*A minimum of a bachelor's degree is required to be certified

*A master's degree is not required at this time by the ACLP, but you must take all coursework listed above so this is a good option to get your courses all at once.

*There are many online and in person options to take the required courses above, see the ACLP website for more information

Practicum

Although not required by the ACLP for certification, many hospital programs require previous practicum experience before obtaining an internship. A practicum experience is 100+ hours of mainly observation of a Certified Child Life Specialist and gives students a deeper understanding of the profession.

See individual hospital sites for practicum application deadlines.

Internship

A Child Life Internship is a minimum of 600 clinical hours under the direct supervision of a Certified Child Life Specialist. Internships prepare you to become a Certified Child Life Specialist by offering a full time, hands on opportunity. By the end of an internship, you should be prepared to enter into the field and become certified.

Internships are very competitive and it may take multiple rounds to be accepted. Most internship sites follow the ACLP's application deadlines, see the ACLP website and specific hospital websites for more details on when and how to apply.

Certification Exam

Before registering for the Child Life Certification Exam, you must complete an Eligibility Assessment on the ACLP website. This means that you submit documents and the ACLP will verify that you have completed at least a bachelor's degree, the 10 required courses, and a 600+ hour clinical internship. Once your Eligibility Assessment is approved, you may register for the exam. Currently the exam is offered three times a year (March, August, November).

The exam is a proctored with 150 multiple choice questions and you have 4 hours to complete it. The exam covers the topics of professional responsibility, assessment, and intervention. If you pass the exam, you are now a Certified Child Life Specialist!

Additional Experiences

Getting into the child life field can be competitive, so adding additional experiences to your resume can be very beneficial! Here are some ideas:

- Join the GLACLP!
- Gain unique experiences with children
- Enroll in the GLACLP's Mentor-Mentee Program to build a connection with a CCLS in the field! The program starts at the beginning of the year.
- Attend a GLACLP or ACLP conference for networking and additional learning

For More Information

<https://www.childlife.org/certification/becoming-certified>

<https://www.childlife.org/certification/becoming-certified/requirements-after-2019>