

Child Life

J. Ann Moylan, PhD, CCLS, CFLE

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What is Child Life

Child Life is a profession and a practice devoted to meeting the psychosocial, emotional and developmental needs of children and adolescents, particularly those who are undergoing medical care for illness, injury, or other needs.



When you think Child Life ...

Think **Preparation!**

Think **Choice!**

Think **Family!**

Think **Play!**





The history of the child life profession dates back to at least the 1920s.

The Child Life Council (CLC) was established as an independent organization.



1920s

1967

1982

2016

The Association for the Care of Children in Hospitals (ACCH) was created

The name was changed to the Association of Child Life Professionals (ACLP).

What does a Certified Child Life Specialist Do?

Certified Child Life Specialists (CCLSs) provide evidence-based, developmentally and psychologically appropriate interventions including therapeutic play, preparation for procedures, and education that support and reduce fear, anxiety and pain for children, adolescents and families.



Child Life is a Collaborating Profession

Child Life Specialists work in partnership with families, interdisciplinary healthcare teams and community professionals within the evolving healthcare system to meet the psychosocial, emotional and development needs of children and adolescents.



How Do You Become a Certified Child Life Specialist?

1. Academic Preparation
2. Clinical Internship
3. Professional Exam



Academic Coursework

- **Option 1: Bachelor's degree**
from an ACLP-endorsed child life
academic program
- **Option 2: Bachelor's degree**
with 10 prescribed college
courses

Or



REQUIRED and RECOMMENDED Courses

1 child life course taught by a Certified Child Life Specialist (FSHD 156 at Sac State is currently offered in spring only)

2 child development courses that combined must cover infancy through adolescence

1 family systems course (FSHD 150, Family Stress and Coping)

1 play course (CHAD 139, Education Play: Theory and Practice or RPTA 126, The Science of Play).

1 loss/bereavement or death and dying course (PSYC 151)

1 research course (many options)

3 additional courses in related areas may include: Ethics; Human Anatomy and Physiology; Medical Terminology; Therapeutic Recreation; Family Development; Family Dynamics; Family Communication; etc.

The Internship Application Process

The Internship application asks you to document your experience with infants, children, youth, and families in the following areas:

- Healthcare
- Stressful Situations
- Well Children



Photo courtesy of Sutter Hospital Sacramento

Volunteer and Work Experience

- Volunteer in a Child Life Setting
- Volunteer/work with children of various ages and backgrounds
- Volunteer/work with children who have special needs
- Complete a Child Life Practicum (often this is optional)
- Complete the Child Life Clinical Internship



Eligibility Assessment Process

The Eligibility Assessment is a living submission that applicants can enter some information now and add to later.

There is a one-time fee of \$80.00 USD.



Eligibility Assessment Process

Step 1: Request to start and pay for the Eligibility Assessment

Step 2: Enter Academic Requirements (degree and coursework) & Internship Information

Step 3: Submit Official Transcripts (and other supporting documentation) to ACLP's Child Life Certification Commission (CLCC).



Photo courtesy of Sutter Hospital Sacramento

When to Apply for a Clinical Internship

Child Life is a competitive field. You need to be prepared to be competitive at every stage. The Internship is a particularly competitive stage.

Before you can sit for the Professional Exam, you must complete a 600+ hour clinical internship in child life under the DIRECT SUPERVISION of a Certified Child Life Specialist.

Internships are typically full-time, hands-on. Unfortunately, most are unpaid. These are NOT CSUS internships! They are provided by hospitals and occasionally in other settings.

PLAN AHEAD

- **Fall 2026 Internships -- Deadline** to apply is **MARCH 13, 2026!** BUT, the deadline to have eligibility assessment started, paid for, transcripts received, and courses entered is **FEBRUARY 24, 2026.**
- **Winter/Spring 2027 Internships --**
Deadline to apply is **September 4, 2026!**
BUT, the deadline to have eligibility assessment started, paid for, transcripts received, and courses entered is **August 19, 2026.**



The Child Life Professional Certification Examination

This final step toward certification is an objective test that covers knowledge, understanding, and practical application of important child life concepts.

It is comprised of 150 multiple-choice questions, and the time allotted to complete the examination is four hours.

Candidates for certification must **establish** **eligibility** through **academic and clinical experiences** **before they apply to take the examination.**

Those who achieve a passing score become certified for a five-year period, after which time they must **recertify**.

There are important ways to make yourself more competitive!

- Gain experience with as many different age groups and populations as possible, both depth and diversity count!
- Study a second language.
- Volunteer or work in different settings: summer camps, preschools, after-school programs, community programs, and youth programs.
- Consider graduate work. The Bachelor's degree is the minimum preparation. You will be competing with those who have a Master's degree.



Reflective Practice

Be prepared to articulate what you learned from your experiences and how these experiences relate to the Internship Readiness Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSAs).



Join the Child Life Community!

- Join our local Sacramento Child Life Network to stay on top of all the happenings in this field locally.
- The Association of Child Life Professionals will hold their annual conference in CHICAGO Thursday, May 21 – Saturday, May 23, 2026. STUDENT REGISTRATION FEE \$100.00.



For More Information

- Your best source of current information is the Association of Child Life Professionals.

www.childlife.org

- You may also reach out to Dr. Ann Moylan, a Certified Child Life Specialist (CCLS) since 1999 and a Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE) since 2001.

Moylan@csus.edu

Good luck in your journey!

