



CHILD LIFE SPECIALIST

JOB DESCRIPTION

A Child Life Specialist is a professional who is specially trained to help children and their families understand and manage challenging life events and stressful healthcare experiences. Child Life Specialists are skilled in providing developmental, educational, and therapeutic interventions for children and their families under stress. Child Life Specialists support growth and development while recognizing family strengths and individuality, and respecting different methods of coping. A child life specialist works in hospitals to help children understand medical procedures and diagnoses through play therapy, accompanies them through those procedures, and offers psychological and emotional support to them and their families.

EXPERIENCE & SKILLS

Persons interested in Child life therapy should have a strong desire to help others and should possess the ability to inspire respect, trust, and confidence. They must be emotionally stable to work with critically ill children and their families. Counselors must follow the code of ethics associated with their respective certifications and licenses. Fluency in a foreign language, such as Spanish is also beneficial. Essential skills are:

- Provide support
- Emotional stability
- Ability to listen/communicate well
- Compassion/sensitivity
- Patience
- Confidence

EDUCATION & TRAINING

Certified Child Life Specialists (CCLS) have earned a Bachelor's or Master's degree, with an educational background that includes human growth and development, education, psychology, and counseling. They are required to complete an internship program and a rigorous application and examination process. Child Life Specialists are certified through a program administered by the Child Life Council (CLC). Those with a bachelors should have solid foundations in psychology, education, child development or child life. A master's degree in child life will be useful to eventually manage a program or be a director of child life program, although some hospitals will accept a complementing degree in child development, therapeutic recreation or child psychology.

SALARIES

Salaries vary depending on work setting, years of experience, specialty and region or state. As with any profession, a city or region's cost of living often dictates salary ranges. Generally, the salary range for a child life specialist is roughly comparable to that of public school teachers in the same geographical area.

Entry level: \$38,579

Average: \$ 42,409

Experienced: \$45,176

EMPLOYMENT & ADVANCEMENT PROSPECTS

While the use of child life specialists has been mostly limited to hospitals, it is now more common to see them in pediatric physician and dental offices, outpatient clinics, counseling clinics, and any other environment that includes a pediatric population. However, because this is a newer profession, positions are somewhat limited. Although more child life specialist positions are available, the profession continues to become more popular for students, therefore making it a more competitive field. Many people find themselves relocating to be closer to a position in child life if one is not offered nearby. Not all hospitals provide child life specialist programs. Be prepared to wait for an opening or to write a grant to start your own program at a hospital without a current child life program.

RELATED OCCUPATIONS

- Human service assistants
- Social workers
- Psychologists
- Occupational Therapists

REFERENCES

- Child Life Council at <http://www.childlife.org/>