

Have You Seen This Major?

CHILD AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT CHILD LIFE SPECIALIST

Students who have a degree in Child and Family Development that have selected Child Life as their emphasis area may become Child Life Specialists (CLS). CLS are trained professionals with expertise in helping children and their families overcome life's most challenging events.

Armed with a strong background in child development and family systems, Child Life Specialists promote effective coping through play, preparation, education, and self-expression activities. They provide emotional support for families and encourage optimum development of children facing a broad range of challenging experiences, particularly those related to healthcare and hospitalization. Because they understand that a child's wellbeing depends on the support of the family, child life specialists provide information, support and guidance to parents, siblings, and other family members. They also play a vital role in educating caregivers, administrators, and the general public about the needs of children under stress.

Students with an interest in becoming a CLS should be willing to relocate to find a job. Larger cities with Children's Hospitals employ more Child Life Specialists. Hospitals employ Child Life Specialists based on their pediatric population – there are one-person programs within general hospitals, while other large Children's Hospitals will employ 75 Child Life Specialists.



WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO EXCEL?

- ◆ Must have knowledge of age-specific growth and development.
- ◆ Enjoy working with children and parents.
- ◆ Have excellent written and verbal communication skills.
- ◆ Have the ability to assess the needs and adjust their language and demeanor to the developmental and emotional state of the child.
- ◆ Work well with a variety of health care professionals and other support people.
- ◆ Be able to manage the emotional stress inherent in working with children who have life-threatening diseases.
- ◆ Be able to manage a variety of tasks simultaneously.
- ◆ Be able to explain complex medical procedures and information to all ages.
- ◆ Must be flexible—there are no two days that are alike.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ABOUT THE DEGREE

Does this major require a minor? What minors work well with this major?

The major is a comprehensive major with an Emphasis in Child Life, so no minor is required.

Does this major require a practicum or internship?

Practicums are currently not a requirement within our emphasis; however, they are strongly encouraged. A practicum is an “experience” usually 100-150 hours of observing and learning the role of a child life specialist. Some hospitals require that it be in the hospital setting with a Certified Specialist, while others will accept outside the hospital (Clinics/Camps, etc.) that is organized by a certified specialist. Both of our local hospitals offer practicums (interested students need to check with them to see what semesters they offer them and the number of students they accept). You are allowed to work/go to school/etc. - they usually work with your schedule (within reason).

The internship is the last semester of your coursework. This experience is a minimum of 480 hours—650 hours (each hospital has its own requirements, the Child Life Council requires 480 hours minimum). The semester that you complete your internship is usually the last semester of your coursework. Students completing their internships are not allowed to take other courses or work other jobs – and unfortunately it is not a paid internship. You will spend 40+ hours at the hospital setting under Certified Child Life Specialists and follow different rotations and then be observed as a future Specialist. The course for MSU is CFD 466 – you may enroll for 6-12 hours. Many students need to maintain full time student status so 12 hours are given. No additional work is required on our end – the hospitals have the curriculum already created for you.

Both practicums and internships are “competitive” to obtain, meaning there is an application process, interview and selection. It is encouraged for everyone to apply to many places for internships (around 10 -15 sites). For example: Spring 2012 -St. Louis Children’s received over 75 applications for 2 internship positions... one of our students made it!

What courses should a student take to explore this major?

Students will have courses that provide a primary base knowledge of typical development of children and then take specialty courses to prepare them for working in a health care environment and with children who are hospitalized or dealing with specific issues such as illnesses, injuries, diseases and disorders.

What are the admission requirements to the major?

There are no admission requirements.

AFTER THE DEGREE

How would you describe the demand for graduates with this major?

Child life is a growing but competitive field. To a large degree, the employer demand for child life specialists will depend on the healthcare industry and geographic location. In some areas, child life positions will not be readily available, and many child life specialists consider relocating for an open entry-level position or internship. There is a growing awareness of the child life profession within the health care community as well as in general public, and we expect to see a corresponding increase in demand for child life specialists.

What are some typical jobs for graduates with this major?

Child life specialists are vital members of a multidisciplinary team in most large pediatric facilities, as well as many smaller pediatric inpatient units. They often service specialty areas like the emergency department, surgical and intensive care units, and outpatient units. Some child life specialists are also available to meet the needs of children of adult patients.

Although child life has its traditional foundations in hospitals, an increasing number of child life specialists are applying their unique expertise to help children in other environments, including outpatient healthcare facilities, doctors’ offices, hospice care, specialized camps, schools, court systems, and funeral homes. Whatever the location, child life interventions focus on the individual needs of the child and family.

What are some of the most successful graduates from the major doing?

Working as Certified Child Life Specialists all over the world in a variety of settings.

Do careers in this field require or prefer graduate study?

Some careers prefer graduate study; however, BS is required along with certification. The Certified Child Life Specialist (CCLS) credential is the exclusive certification issued by the Child Life Council. The CCLS credentialing program is a rigorous, examination-based professional certification credential. The requirements for getting certified are based on academic and clinical experiences, and successful completion of the Child Life Professional Certification Examination.

Missouri State[™]
U N I V E R S I T Y

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