What is a Child Life Specialist?

Child Life Specialists (CLS) 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.

How do I become a Child Life Specialist?

Earn Undergraduate: At a minimum you will need to earn a bachelor’s degree focusing on human growth and development, education, psychology, or a related field of study. Common undergraduate degrees can include Psychology, Social Work, Family and Child Development, or Human Services.

Enroll in 10 Approved Classes: While earning your undergraduate degree, enroll in 10 child-related classes approved by the Child Life Council. Classes currently approved that you may choose from are:
- PSYC 210, 221, 231, 311, 317, 320, 341, 345, 365, 430, and 450 (required CLS class)
- FACS 204, 205, 260, 350, 361, 365, 455, 470, and 475
- NURS 105

Psychology 450 is taught by a Certified Child Life Specialist and must be one of the 10 classes taken.

Complete a CLS Internship: A 480 hour internship must be completed under the direct supervision of an approved Certified Child Life Specialist.

Test for Certification: Lastly, you will complete a two-part exam which will be renewed every 5 years.

Certified Child Life Specialist (CCLS)

What do future requirements and changes look like?

2019: Beginning in 2019, the number of internship hours required will increase from 480 to 600.
2022: Effective 2022, candidates to become a CCLS will be required to hold a Master’s degree.
2025: Effective in 2025, this requirement will be amended to require that all certification candidates hold a master’s degree in child life from an academic program accredited by CLC.

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<th>Minimum Number of Classes Required</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
<th>Liberty Course</th>
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| 2                                 | Child Development                     | Growth/development for all ages from birth to 18 years must be covered. If any portion of this age span is not covered, additional courses must be taken | PSYC 210: Developmental Psychology  
*PSYC 221: Psychology of Childhood (Fall)  
PSYC 231: Psychology of Adolescence (Spring) |
| 1                                 | Family Systems                        |                                                                                       | PSYC 361: Marriage and Family  
FACS 370: Parenting  
FACS 470: Internal Dynamics of Families  
FACS 475: Families Under Stress |
| 1                                 | Therapeutic Benefits of Play          |                                                                                        | FACS 361: Therapy and Theory of Play in Early Childhood                       |
| 1                                 | Research                             |                                                                                        | PSYC 255: Introduction to Research                                             |
| 1                                 | Child Life                           | Taught by a CCLS                                                                       | PSYC 450: Children in Healthcare                                              |
| 1                                 | Loss/ Bereavement or Death and Dying  |                                                                                        | PSYC 317: Crisis Intervention  
NURS 419: Strategies for End of Life Care                                    |
| 3                                 | Additional Courses in Child Life or Related area | It is strongly recommended (though not required) that applicants for certification pursue course work in the following areas: Human Anatomy/ Physiology, Medical Terminology, & Ethics | NURS 105: Medical Terminology  
PSYC 320: Behavior Modification  
PSYC 341: Psychology of Personality  
PSYC 345: Exceptional Child  
PSYC 351: Multicultural Counseling and Research Issues  
PSYC 355: Statistics of Psychology  
PSYC 365: Psychological Foundations of Learning  
PSYC 371: Theories in Counseling and Psychotherapy  
PSYC 380: Physiological Psychology  
PSYC 405: Group Dynamics  
PSYC 421: Psychological Measurement  
PSYC 460: Counseling Process and Techniques  
FACS 204: Introduction to Family and Child Development  
FACS 260: Early Childhood I  
FACS 365: Administration of Family and Child Life Programs |

Table adapted from CLC website

* Students must verify when classes are offered for course planning.  
Each course may only satisfy one of the requirements; none can be applied to meet two or more of these required courses.