



**Association of Child Life Professionals  
Child Life Certification Commission  
Operational Policy**

**SUBJECT: 6.0 RATIONALE FOR ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS**

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**RATIONALE**

**Benchmarking**

In 2011, a working group was formed to re-assess the eligibility requirements. Initial benchmarking related to requirements in other professions yielded the following:

Academic	Clinical
Art Therapy	
Master's Degree in Art Therapy OR Bachelor's/Master's Dual Degree pgm and Art Therapy w/ required content areas	Minimum 100 hour practicum and minimum 600 hour internship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• &gt; 1/2 of faculty must have practiced in most recent 5 year period</li> <li>• new pgms must have existed for 4 academic yrs or graduated at least 3 consecutive classes</li> </ul>	

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of students • Min of 24 credits in art therapy • Faculty must hold ATR	
<b>Music Therapy</b>	
Individuals w/ bacc. degree may complete degree equiv. pgm in music th. from AMTA-approved univ. student completes only coursework necessary for equiv music ther trg w/o necessarily earning 2nd bacc. degree.	Minimum of 1200 hours practcum/ internship 900 hours must be internship hours
• They celebrated their 60th anniversary in 2010 & at that time began to consider moving the entry level of the profession to a Master's degree.	
<b>Nursing</b>	
RN – 4 year BScN degree OR RPN – 2 year diploma program	
<b>Occupational Therapy</b>	
Must have a Masters in Occupational Therapy	Minimum of 24 weeks full time
<b>Physiotherapy</b>	
Must complete Masters in Physiotherapy from accredited physiotherapy pgm	
<b>Physician Assistant</b>	
2 yrs undergrad + 24 mo PA Educ Pgm	
<b>Speech Therapy</b>	
master's in speech pathology Many obtain certification; most states require licensure.	
<b>Social Work</b>	
bachelor's degree required for most direct-service positions, some positions/settings require master's Clinical social workers must have master's; Licensure varies by state. Clinical social workers must be licensed.	
Social Work Licensing Basics: Bachelors: Bacc. degree upon graduation; Masters: Master's (MSW) with no post-degree experience; Advanced Generalist: MSW with 2 yrs post-master's supervised experience; Clinical: MSW with 2 yrs post-master's direct clinical social work experience.	

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Play Therapy	
Min of MA in Practice Based Play Therapy or Masters or Medical Degree in approp. profession (e.g. psych, peds, educ, recr ther, child life, creative arts, OT, SLP, social work. Regardless of degree - certain core academic areas must be completed.	2500 hrs direct clin practice in play ther (indiv & group process). Min of 2000 must be w/ children, up to 500 may be w/ adol/adults. Max of 500 may involve other forms of clin work Min 200 hrs of direct clin sup of applicant's practice of play ther. 100 of these must be individualized supervision.
Hospital Chaplain	
most hospitals require bach deg in counseling, theology or related field. Many larger hospitals require Master of Divinity, endorsement by a religious inst or additional training/ credentialing through a professional organization such as Assn for Clin Pastoral Educ	Assn for Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) website. programs may have pre-requirements like Bachelor's or Master's in theology or related fields.
Recreation Therapy	
TR bachelor's degree is usually a requirement however some States may regulate recreational therapists, with varying requirements. Some may be required to become certified.	supervised internship of at least 480 hours
Mental Health Counseling	
typically required to have master's in counseling, psych, SW, human services or related field. Master's required for licensure or certification Ph.D. may be required for advanced counseling careers.	Varies.

**Eligibility Requirements Effective January 1, 2019**

The policy ESTABLISHING ELIGIBILITY (Section 3, Candidate Policies, 1.0) outlines the eligibility requirements effective January 1, 2019. Below is the rationale for these requirements.

- A. Minimum of Bachelor's Degree:** Candidates must complete a minimum of a bachelor's degree or the international equivalent.

**Rationale:** Pursuant to the following course work requirement, holding a bachelor's degree is necessary to achieve the completion of the required course work.

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**B. Course Work:** Candidates must successfully complete the following college courses for credit from an academic institution that has been accredited by an organization recognized by either the US Department of Education or the Council on Higher Education Accreditation, or the international equivalent:

Number of Classes Required	Subject	Additional Requirements
1	Child Life	Taught by a CCLS who meets additional requirements*
2	Child Development	Covering growth and development from birth to 18 years
1	Family Systems	
1	Play	
1	Loss/Bereavement or Death/Dying	
1	Human Anatomy/Physiology	
1	Medical Terminology	
1	Ethics	
1	Research.	

\*CCLS instructors for the child life course will be REQUIRED to:

- Hold and maintain professional child life certification throughout the period of instruction
- Have 2 years or 4,000 hours of paid child life clinical experience OR have a minimum of 2 years of experience teaching child life subject matter as of 2022.

**Note:** If an instructor does not have 2 years of experience teaching child life subject matter as of 2022, they must have 2 years or 4,000 hours of paid child life clinical experience.

- Maintain knowledge of the Child Life Code of Ethics and the Official Documents of the Association of Child Life Professionals
- It is also recommended that CCLS instructors pursue training relevant to the adult learning styles and evidence-based teaching methodology.

**Rationale:** Many of the other professions that were examined require a specific major area of study. The working group started by looking at related majors that might be accepted without reviewing individual classes, but it was quickly determined that there was too much variance in what is required at different universities for each of the majors considered to approve any outright.

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The group then focused on content necessary to adequately prepare an entry-level, minimally-competent child life specialist. This started with a “wish list” curriculum which was pared down to core content requirements.

**Survey**

To gauge the support of the certification community to changes in the academic requirements for certification, the committee returned to a 43-question survey that was emailed to over 5,000 individuals in the certification database in July 2011. There were over 1,300 respondents to this survey. The table below shows the percentages of respondents who thought the listed areas of study should be required to establish eligibility for the certification exam.

Area of study	Should be required	Should NOT be required	Undecided
Child Development	99%	1%	0%
Death and Dying	91%	5%	4%
Family Development	89%	4%	7%
Family Dynamics	85%	6%	9%
Cultural Diversity	85%	9%	6%
Child Life	82%	10%	8%
Psychology	80%	9%	11%
Medical Terminology	77%	13%	10%
Expressive Therapies	63%	20%	18%
Anatomy & Physiology	57%	25%	18%
Biomedical Ethics	52%	24%	23%
Counseling	51%	26%	23%
Sociology	42%	31%	27%
Other	26%	13%	61%

**Evolution of the Eligibility Requirements**

Since its inception in 1998, the eligibility requirements for the Child Life Professional Certification Examination have changed little. At that time exam candidates were required to:

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**Education:** Have completed a minimum of a Bachelor's Degree with a minimum of 10 courses in child life, child development, child and family studies or closely related courses, documented by an original official transcript from the college/university.

**Experience:** Have successfully completed at least 480 hours of child life clinical experience or paid work experience as a child life specialist, documented on letterhead or by certificate from each clinical experience site or employer with hours and dates indicated and signed by the clinical supervisor or immediate supervisor. The clinical experience hours could be completed in more than one site.

In addition, child life educators were able to establish eligibility for the exam as follows:

**Education:** Hold a graduate level degree with a minimum of 10 courses in child life, child development, child and family studies or closely related courses, documented with an original official transcript from college/university.

**Experience:** Teach at the college or university level, documented with faculty appointment letter on institutional letterhead.

In the 20 intervening years, the following changes have been made:

- Educators no longer allowed to take the exam without clinical experience (2000)
- Added requirement that clinical experience be supervised by a CCLS (2000)
- Students in their final semester of study for bachelor's degree able to establish eligibility (2000)
- Practicums no longer listed as acceptable clinical experience (2003)
- Paid work experience no longer accepted (2012)
- Anticipated graduation no longer accepted (2013)
- Child life course taught by a CCLS required (2013)

Having experience implementing the loosely-defined requirement "10 courses in child life, child development, child and family studies or closely related courses" and seeing the courses that were being submitted as "related," the committee has made several attempts over the years to clarify its intention for this requirement.

However, it was possible for applicants who had never taken a class in child development to be seated for the exam. Yet we consistently accepted courses that were not truly relevant to child life practice. For example, because the policy stated that all classes from the department of sociology were accepted, a Criminal Justice major who had taken 9 sociology courses plus 1 child life course taught by a CCLS was able to establish eligibility.

### **Job Analysis**

The new requirements link the eligibility requirements to job requirements that were identified in the 2013 Job Analysis Study.

When the 2013 Job Analysis was completed, it became evident that many elements of the previous Exam Classification System had to be stripped from the new system. In fact, it was determined that what was expected of a minimally-qualified, entry-level CCLS had to be limited

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because applicants are not being trained in those areas. These included references to medical terminology, elements that required knowledge of anatomy and physiology, and research.

The purpose of the Job Analysis is to define the job responsibilities for a specific target population and to provide evidence that what is being assessed is related to that job. Otherwise, the examination cannot be considered valid. In this case the target population is minimally-competent, entry-level child life specialists. When defining the knowledge and skills in the Exam Classification System, the Job Analysis panel of Subject Matter Experts focused on those elements that an individual will have on “day 1.” The topics represented in the requirement are considered to be essential to an entry-level, minimally-competent child life specialist.

**Supporting ACLP Documents**

When reflecting on the coursework to be required, the following previously-approved ACLP documents were considered, and each course is supported by at least two of these.

1. Undergraduate Curriculum Recommendations
2. Graduate Curriculum Recommendations
3. Child Life Competencies
4. Child Life Course Definition (Required Areas of Study)

With respect to the specific classes, the table below shows which of the documents above support the recommendations of the committee.

Required Subject	Supported by
Child Life	1, 2, 3, 4
Child Development	1, 2, 3, 4
Family Systems	1, 2, 3
Play	1, 2, 3, 4
Loss/Bereavement or Death/Dying	1, 2, 3
Human Anatomy/Physiology	2, 3
Medical Terminology	2, 3
Ethics	2, 4
Research	2, 3

**Child Development Requirement**

The group determined that one child development course, such as a lifespan of development, would not provide the in-depth knowledge pertaining to children that would promote the “strong background in child development” that defines a child life specialist.

Child life specialists work primarily with populations from birth to 18 years of age. Courses focusing on adults or seniors will not be accepted. Although the group’s preference would be for three courses in child development that covered this entire age range (i.e., infancy/toddlerhood, preschool/school-age, and adolescence), they determined that two classes that target groups of children within this age range would be appropriate.

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### **Ethics Requirement**

It is preferred that certification candidates take an ethics class with a focus on medical/health care ethics, but the commission will accept an introductory ethics class. It is a requirement for recertification through professional development that CCLSs continue learning on this topic. The committee felt that this requirement will form a good basis for future study in this area and for ethics from a child life perspective to be discussed.

### **Research Requirement**

The goal of requiring a class on research is to expose candidates to research in general so that they will be able to articulate basic research methods, statistics and outcomes that apply to clinical practice and program review. Therefore, an introductory class will be sufficient.

### **Psychology and Cultural Diversity**

Topics such as psychology and cultural diversity were not added as specific class requirements as these topics will be woven throughout the required classes and the committee did not find it necessary for candidates for certification to have an additional class with these as the primary focus.

**C. Clinical Child Life Experience:** Applicants must complete a minimum of 600 hours of a child life clinical internship under the direct supervision of a Certified Child Life Specialist who:

- Maintains professional child life certification throughout the supervisory period
- Has a minimum of 4,000 hours of paid child life clinical experience prior to the start of the supervisory period
- Takes responsibility for the educational development and guidance of the candidate in the clinical setting

**Rationale:** Through appropriate coursework, students learn a great deal about child life practice. However, much of what a child life specialist does is learned in the clinical setting; there is no substitute for direct experience in a clinical environment. Due to the amount of personal responsibility involved, clinical training helps students to mature professionally.

Interns receive professional feedback that is immediate and constructive which allows them to develop practical skills in the healthcare setting. Further, it encourages the student's understanding of what they have learned in the academic setting and how it applies to skills needed in the clinical setting in which they hope to practice.

The decision to recommend an increase in the number of required internship hours to 600 was based on the following factors:

- Commission members who have supervised interns indicated that the 600-hour duration was the appropriate length to permit the coverage of all the elements listed in the "Definition of Clinical Supervision" in the Official Documents of the Child Life Council.

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- The understanding that the Internship Accreditation Task Force would be recommending that the duration of an accredited internship would be a minimum of 600 hours in order to become eligible for accreditation. Their decision was based on benchmarking from child life internship programs.
- This increase would still allow an internship to be completed within a traditional academic semester and would not require major changes to the established examination schedule (40 hours x 15 weeks = 600 hours).

### **SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION**

CLCC Policies Manual, Section 2 – Candidate Policies, 1.0 ESTABLISHING ELIGIBILITY  
ACLP Undergraduate Curriculum Recommendations  
ACLP Graduate Curriculum Recommendations  
ACLP Child Life Competencies  
Child Life Course Definition (Required Areas of Study)

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