



CHILD LIFE COMPETENCIES

Introduction

The following child life competencies are the minimal level of acceptable practice as defined by the Child Life Council and are a guide for individuals or organizations who may wish to further define competencies specific to their situation. The order of competencies does not reflect a sequence or hierarchy of importance.

I. Care of Infants, Children, Youth, and Families

A. Competency

The ability to assess the developmental and psychosocial needs of infants, children, youth, and families.

Knowledge

- Articulate theories of human growth and development, play, and family systems.
- Describe formal and informal techniques to assess developmental and emotional state.
- Identify relevant data used to develop a comprehensive child life assessment.
- Identify factors that impact a child and family's vulnerability to stress and trauma.
- Identify how children and families interpret and make meaning of health, illness, and loss.
- Recognize families as they define themselves, identifying strengths and challenges in family dynamics and community supports.
- Describe the cyclical process of assessment, plan, intervention, and evaluation of child life services.

Skill

- Apply formal and informal techniques to assess developmental level and emotional state.
- Integrate the strengths and resources of the child and family into the plan of care.
- Prioritize child life services based on susceptibility to stress and trauma.
- Effectively collaborate with members of the service team to create a collaborative plan of care.
- Apply the cyclical process of assessment, plan, intervention, and evaluation of services to keep assessments accurate and up-to-date.

B. Competency

The ability to initiate and maintain meaningful and therapeutic relationships with infants, children, youth, and families.

Knowledge

- Articulate the tenets of patient and family-centered care.
- Describe the essential elements of the therapeutic relationship.
- Identify effective communication skills to support a child and family.
- Identify values related to sociocultural diversity.
- Recognize educational opportunities and resources that are responsive to the needs of the child and family in order to promote learning and mastery.

Skill

- Build trust and rapport with infants, children, youth, and families.
- Maintain appropriate professional boundaries to preserve the therapeutic relationship.
- Utilize effective communication skills in the process of supporting children and families.
- Utilize therapeutic and creative modalities to meet individual developmental and emotional needs.
- Match and pace interactions according to developmental level, emotional state, family preferences, and individual needs.
- Support the central role of the family, valuing strengths and needs in implementing child life services.
- Demonstrate respect for sociocultural diversity.

C. Competency

The ability to provide opportunities for play for infants, children, youth, and families.

Knowledge

- Articulate the definitions and functions of play.
- Identify the developmental and social milestones of play.
- Identify therapeutic approaches that facilitate open-ended, developmentally-supportive play and expressive arts.
- Understand common play themes relevant to life events and healthcare experiences.
- Identify toys and materials that encourage open-ended and expressive play, as well as close-ended play, and the value and purpose of each.
- Recognize ways in which activities and materials can encourage cultural connections.
- Identify theories related to play that best support child life practice.

Skill

- Demonstrate the ability to assess individual play needs and incorporate play into daily practice.
- Facilitate opportunities for play to decrease distress, provide enjoyment and comfort, enhance mastery, and promote healing.
- Plan and implement appropriate play activities and materials for children and families of diverse cultures, varying developmental needs, and physical abilities.
- Plan and implement activities that encourage expression of a range of emotions.
- Demonstrate the ability to observe a child's play to conduct a developmental and coping assessment.
- Utilize child-centered responses and techniques to facilitate a safe, non-judgmental, non-evaluative environment for children to explore and express themselves.
- Establish safe and engaging play spaces that promote cross-cultural connections, facilitate group play, and encourage children to choose and explore at their own pace.
- Model and teach child-directed play skills to build capacity in others, such as volunteers, medical staff, and family caregivers.

D. Competency

The ability to provide a safe, therapeutic and healing environment for infants, children, youth, and families.

Knowledge

- Explain the impact of environmental design on human behavior.
- Identify emotional safety hazards and corresponding preventive and protective measures to include education on mandated reporting.
- Identify environmental safety hazards and corresponding preventive and protective measures.
- Recognize public health guidelines for technology in early childhood and identify digital content that facilitates coping.
- Identify knowledge of privacy and confidentiality policies.

Skill

- Establish and maintain a therapeutic, healing and family-centered environment.
- Provide input about facility design to promote orientation, comfort, healing, culturally inclusive materials, security and normalization.
- Implement infection control and safety policies and procedures.
- Demonstrate respect for and facilitate privacy and confidentiality.

E. Competency

The ability to support infants, children, youth, and families in coping with stressful events.

Knowledge

- Identify types of stressful events affecting children and families, including medical procedures, pain, traumatic life events, loss, end of life, and grief work.
- Identify factors that may impact vulnerability to stress.
- Describe immediate and long-term coping styles and techniques, as well as their effect on adjustment and behavior.
- Describe sensory, cognitive, and behavioral coping strategies specific to developmental stages and populations.
- Articulate effective non-pharmacological pain management techniques.
- Identify principles of effective advocacy in partnership with families and other team members.
- Understand the role of communication, particularly active listening and empathic responding, in building relationships with families undergoing stress.
- Understand the role of self-reflection in aiding patients and families in the process of mourning.
- Identify various stages or models of grief surrounding the dying process.

Skill

- Assess responses to stress; plan, implement and evaluate care accordingly.
- Introduce and facilitate rehearsal of techniques to aid immediate and long-term coping, with consideration for the unique needs of the individual and family, such as coping style, previous experience, developmental level, culture, spirituality, family situation, and emotional state.
- Facilitate mastery of potentially stressful experiences.
- Utilize appropriate non-pharmacological pain management strategies.

- Empower and support patients and families to effectively self-advocate as well as advocate on behalf of those who cannot do so.
- Demonstrate an ability to use verbal and non-verbal empathic responses with children and caregivers during stressful events.
- Implement a team plan for coping support during medical procedures, including parental presence with guidance, comfort positions, role responsibilities, and distraction techniques to help children refocus their attention.
- Facilitate opportunities for play and dialogue following stressful events to reflect upon emotional responses and reinforce coping skills.
- Act as a team participant in bereavement work on behalf of families.
- Assess self-awareness skills concerning stress, trauma response, loss, and grief work in order to practice effective self-reflection.

F. Competency

The ability to provide teaching, specific to the population served, including psychological preparation for potentially stressful experiences, with infants, children, youth, and families.

Knowledge

- Identify basic terminology, processes, and expected plan of care for the population served.
- Articulate learning styles and needs of individuals with various developmental levels, emotional states, and of diverse backgrounds and experiences.
- Identify teaching techniques for use with individuals of diverse developmental levels and learning needs.
- Describe common fears, misconceptions and concerns of individuals in each developmental stage.
- Describe how children construct knowledge of their healthcare experience through interaction with other children, adults, and materials.
- Articulate fundamentals of psychological preparation found in child life literature.

Skill

- Assess knowledge level, misconceptions, previous experience, and unique sociocultural and learning needs.
- Determine realistic goals and objectives for learning in collaboration with family members and professionals and identify an action plan to achieve these goals.
- Use accurate and developmentally appropriate teaching aids and techniques to increase knowledge and support emotional needs.
- Recognize verbal and non-verbal cues and adapt teaching accordingly.
- Use minimally threatening, developmentally supportive language.
- Describe sensory information, sequence, timing and duration of events.
- Facilitate planning, rehearsal, implementation, and evaluation of coping strategies.

II. Professional Responsibility

A. Competency

The ability to practice within the scope of professional and personal knowledge and skill base.

Knowledge

- Demonstrate an understanding of the scope of practice as defined by the appropriate state jurisdiction or regulatory organization.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the interconnections between scope of practice and practice setting.
- Take action to ensure personal responsibilities and professional competencies are maintained and do not fall below a level considered acceptable in the field of practice.
- Manage overlaps in scope of practice with other professions.

Skill

- Communicate the child life scope of practice accurately and effectively.
- Review scope of practice with peers and supervisors within practice setting.
- Coordinate care with the healthcare team and families based on specified scope of practice.
- Recommend appropriate professional consults or referrals when circumstances are beyond the scope of child life practice.

B. Competency

The ability to continuously engage in self-reflective professional child life practice.

Knowledge

- Recognize and describe how personal challenges and learning needs in knowledge and practice skills may impact service delivery.
- Identify resources and opportunities for professional development.
- Articulate reasons for and impact of under-involvement and over-involvement of professionals with children and families.
- Articulate the impact of one's own culture, values, beliefs, and behaviors on interactions with diverse populations.

Skill

- Include evidence-based practice in decisions about assessment, care, and evaluation.
- Implement a plan for professional development based on the needs of the population served and the knowledge and skill level of the child life specialist.
- Seek advanced practice mentors and peer supervision.

C. Competency

The ability to function as a member of the service team.

Knowledge

- Describe services and resources of other professionals and identify their roles and functions.
- Identify the unique contribution of the family and professionals in the provision of care.
- Articulate the organizational structure and function of the interdisciplinary team.
- Describe the impact of communication styles on groups and individuals.
- Identify the importance of advocacy in collaboration with the medical team.
- Recognize the integral role of patient and family within the interdisciplinary team.

Skill

- Communicate concisely with other professionals, integrating theory and evidence-based practice to obtain and share pertinent information.
- Demonstrate respect for the viewpoints of other professionals.
- Coordinate child life services with families and professionals.
- Partner with the interdisciplinary team, including the patient and family, to integrate team goals into child life services.
- Create concise, objective and accurate clinical notes, documenting information pertinent to the plan of care.
- Instruct families in the culture of medicine and delivery of healthcare so that families can effectively self-advocate and navigate the healthcare system.
- Serve as an example by modelling the tenets of patient and family-centered care during interactions with patients, families, and staff.

III. Education and Supervision

A. Competency

The ability to represent and communicate child life practice and psychosocial issues of infants, children, youth, and families to others.

Knowledge

- Describe and integrate the basic concepts of public speaking and teaching methods appropriate to subject matter and audience.
- Identify classic and current literature on issues related to child life services in a manner meaningful to the audience.
- Articulate the process for engaging in evidence-based practice.
- Identify and articulate a definition of advocacy.

Skill

- Adapt approaches, media, and content according to audience need.
- Apply child life knowledge to contribute to the education of others.
- Maintain professional presentation of self, including careful attention to verbal and written communication, as well as personal appearance.
- Demonstrate effective advocacy for child life practice and psychosocial issues.
- Demonstrate the ability to partner with patients and families and share their unique perspectives in educating others on child life practice and psychosocial issues.

B. Competency

The ability to supervise child life students and volunteers.

Knowledge

- Discuss supervisory styles and their impact on others.
- Identify skills and knowledge necessary for others to complete assignments and tasks.
- Articulate student and volunteer program goals and expectations in the context of providing child life services.
- Identify adult learning needs.

Skill

- Provide comprehensive orientation to the setting, and policies and procedures of the work environment.
- Communicate expectations and roles clearly and concisely.
- Structure duties and assignments, matching ability to complexity of task.
- Provide regular feedback in a constructive manner.
- Assess and respond to diverse learning needs of students and volunteers.
- Recommend dismissal, after counseling, when performance does not match expectations.
- Evaluate student and volunteer programs and modify as needed.
- Provide a safe learning environment.

IV. Research Fundamentals

Competency

The ability to integrate clinical evidence and fundamental child life knowledge into professional decision-making.

Knowledge

- Describe research methodologies that are relevant to the child life field (qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, evidence-based practice, and quality improvement).
- Articulate the role and purpose of research design.
- Adhere to ethical guidelines regarding research participation selection, including vulnerable populations, informed consent and assent, and maintaining confidentiality.

Skill

- Access clinically pertinent information from a variety of sources (e.g. research articles, expert opinion, professional conferences).
- Engage in dynamic evaluation of clinical assessments, interventions, and outcomes.
- Share evidence-based rationales for assessments, plans, and interventions with colleagues, students, patients, and families.
- Critically evaluate and apply literature to practice.
- Demonstrate ability to write scholarly work.

V. Administration

A. Competency

The ability to develop and evaluate child life services.

Knowledge

- Identify program components that require assessment.
- Identify meaningful data for effective evaluation of child life services.
- Describe resources to assist in evaluation and development of services.

Skill

- Collect and report accurate and pertinent data in a timely manner.
- Recommend program improvements based on data and existing resources.

- Develop and prioritize the range of child life services.

B. Competency

The ability to implement child life services within the structure and culture of the work environment.

Knowledge

- Identify organizational structure and relevant policies and procedures.
- Articulate the mission and goals of the work environment.
- Identify methods for obtaining needed resources.
- Identify information necessary for effectively managing resources.

Skill

- Prioritize and organize workload for accurate and timely outcomes.
- Procure and maintain equipment and supplies in a cost-effective manner.
- Adhere to relevant policies and procedures.
- Advocate for just and equitable delivery of family-centered care in the work environment.
- Advocate for the inclusion of the patient and family voice in organizational decision making.
- Advocate for positive change.

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