Child Life Specialist

If you are interested in working with hospitalized children who are chronically or critically ill, you might find Child Life a rewarding career area.

Child Life Specialists help reduce the stress and anxiety that many children experience in hospital and healthcare settings, such as:
- hospitals
- pediatric physician and dental offices
- counseling clinics
- any other environment that includes a pediatric population

Typically, child life professionals:
1. supervise therapeutic and diversional play;
2. prepare children for and assist children during medical tests and procedures through education, rehearsal, and coping skill development
3. support families during hospitalization or challenging events

Knowledge and application of foundations in theories of child development, play, stress and coping, counseling, and family systems are the basis for child life professional practice. Undergraduates should take courses in these areas.

Child Life Specialists can work at the bachelor's or master's level, although now that the career has become very popular, it is becoming harder to find employment openings at the bachelor's level. At either degree level, certification is required.

Certification can be obtained through the Child Life Council: www.childlife.org. This web site is an excellent source of information about this career and also lists graduate programs in Child Life.

A supervised practicum of 480 hours is required for certification. Students usually begin working toward certification by volunteering in a Child Life unit, then choose a Child Life placement while taking PSY 490 – Practicum, and proceed to a formal Child Life internship arranged through a specific hospital.

Child Life Specialists typically have Master's degrees in one of the following areas:
- Social Work
- Child and Family Services/Life/Development
- Child Life

DeVos Children's Hospital usually offers a Child Life Career Information Day twice a year. This information will be posted on the Psychology Majors/Minors Blackboard organizatoin, the bulletin boards outside the psychology department, and mentioned in the Psychology Majors/Minors Newsletter. For more information about the Child Life Department at DeVos Children's Hospital, go to: http://www.devoschildrenshospital.org/ and search for “Pediatric Specialties and Services,” then choose “Child Life.”