

How Can I Become a Child Life Therapist?



ACLTA represents **child life therapists**. If you are interested in the field of play therapy (a branch of psychology/counselling), then please refer to information on the websites of the Australian Play Therapists Association (www.apta.asn.au) and/or the Australasia Pacific Play Therapy Association (www.appta.org.au).

The most common question we are emailed here at ACLTA is "How do I get a job as a Child Life Therapist?" It's an amazing role, and a privilege to serve children and their families in this way.

We believe there are many talented education/health professionals that would love to join our ranks. We have gathered some information here for you to take into consideration as you embark on your Child Life Therapy journey!

We have (had) different job titles – but we do the same role

When searching for jobs, you may still find there are multiple titles for our profession, varying between sites. Although our members voted in 2014 to change to the national title of 'Child Life Therapist', it will take time for all states/territories and facilities to make this change.

The most common previously used titles are play therapist (not to be confused with the branch of psychology by the same name, see note above), play coordinator and educational play therapist.



Child Life Therapy is a small profession in Australia (for now!)

Child Life Therapy is still only at the beginning stages of recognition in Australia, when compared with our colleagues in the USA and UK. ACLTA continues to work on advocating for the work of Child Life Therapy within paediatrics as part of our mission statement.

Thanks to a national benchmarking project, as of September 2014 we know that there are **92 Child Life Therapists in Australia – sharing around 70 Full Time Equivalent positions**. Most of these positions reside in public hospitals, in larger cities and towns. Many positions are part time; some are contracted on a temporary basis.

There is no single qualification you need – it varies between states and territories (but this may change soon)

As a young profession in Australia, we do not yet have one degree/qualification that prepares you to work in Child Life Therapy. However we have ACLTA endorsed recommendations for minimum qualifications available on our website (childlife.org.au); we are also currently working towards a specific postgraduate qualification.

The current qualifications for employment are listed by state below - however there may be some irregularities, particularly in smaller sites (where child life therapists may have been employed under nursing/child care awards).

In NSW: The Allied Health Professionals Award 2008 states the employment criteria for a Play Therapist as, "must hold a bachelor of early childhood, primary teaching or a related field that includes two years study in child development, or other qualification deemed equivalent by the employer."

In Victoria: In Victoria: The Victorian Health Professional Services Award requires a Play Therapist to hold a Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood or Primary Teaching.

In Western Australia: Diploma in Children's Services, or equivalent relevant experience, and knowledge in the area of early childhood development within a health care environment.

In Queensland: Occupational Therapists may be employed specifically to provide developmental and medical/preparatory play in larger paediatric settings.

In other states and territories, awards vary between alignment with other allied health professions, or nursing.

Here's what you can do to increase your suitability for employment...

- ☺ Join ACLTA as an associate member or student – find out more at www.childlife.org.au
- ☺ Like us on Facebook (search for Association of Child Life Therapists Australia) - jobs will often be posted via these channels, or on the ACLTA website
- ☺ Find employment, experience and/or postgraduate study that relates to working with children. Most Child Life Therapists have many years of experience and/or have completed extra study in education, child care, other types of healthcare, disability or the arts. This will make you a more desirable applicant for a HPS role, as you will be able to draw on a solid foundation of background knowledge
- ☺ Regularly check state/territory health department or children's hospital websites for job advertisements
- ☺ Volunteer at your local Children's Hospital or Paediatric Ward/Unit. This is a perfect opportunity to learn about the healthcare environment while supporting the work of your local hospital. You may find there are opportunities to support your local child life therapists, or other vital services. Speak with your local hospital's volunteer coordinator.
- ☺ If you are completing an education degree, there may be the possibility of completing a practicum/placement in a larger Child Life Therapy Department. Usually these students will need to be completing their studies with a high grade average, and be in the final year of their degree. Contact the relevant department in your closest Children's Hospital to check for opportunities.

We wish you the best of luck in your career! The ACLTA Executive 2014