

Course Designator, Section: Course Title
Department

HCB 523: Special Topics in Medical Humanities
Child Life and Compassionate Care

Fall 2025

Location: HSC, Level 3, Seminar room 067, Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care, and Bioethics

Meeting Dates and Times: Wednesdays 6-9pm

Office Hours: By appointment via Zoom

Course Instructor: Michael Attard, MA, CCLS
Clinical Instructor, Department of Family, Population and Preventive Medicine

Contact Information:

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Course Overview

This course will explore the delivery of compassionate psychosocial care to hospitalized children and their families through the lens of a child life specialist. Close attention is paid to understanding the nature of the child, communication, the medical experience, and the power of play in a pediatric healthcare setting. Emphasis will be placed on resilience and empowerment, while respecting grace and dignity during stressful and potentially traumatic events.

Learning Objectives

1. Develop a deeper understanding of play as a healing modality.
2. Identify resources available to help children and families cope through hospitalization
3. Examine the role of compassion in pediatric healthcare settings
4. Analyze the nature of the child and power of resilience
5. Identify developmental stressors in children facing medical experiences
6. Explain how child life specialists contribute to patient-and family-centered care as part of the interdisciplinary team.

Required Course Materials:

Thompson, Richard H. (Ed.).(2018). The Handbook of Child Life. (2nd edition). Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publishing.

Course Schedule:

Make sure to read all assigned materials before attending class.

Wednesday August 27

Class 1: The History of Child Life

Readings

ACLP (n.d.). ACLP historical timeline.

<https://www.childlife.org/about-aclp/history-of-aclp>

Boles, J., Fraser, C., Bennett, K., Jones, M., Dunbar, J., Woodburn, A., Gill, M.A., Duplechain, A., Munn, E.K., & Hoskins, K. (January, 2020). The Value of Certified Child Life Specialists: Direct and Downstream Optimization of Pediatric Patient and Family Outcomes. Association of Child Life Professionals.

https://www.childlife.org/docs/default-source/aclp-official-documents/value-of-a-certified-child-life-specialist_full-report.pdf

Wojtasik, S.P. & White, C. (2018). The Story of Child Life. (pp.3-22). In R. H. Thompson's (Ed.), The Handbook of Child Life (2nd ed.). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishing.

Watch in class:

Robertson, J. (Director). (1953). A Two Year Old Goes To Hospital. [Film]. Concord Media.

Reflection journal 1 due August 31

Wednesday September 3

Class 2: The Nature of the Child: Theory to Practice

Readings

Koller, D., & Wheelwright, D. (2020). Disrupting the Status Quo: A New Theoretical Vision for the Child Life Profession. The Journal of Child Life: Psychosocial Theory and Practice, 1(2), 27–32. <https://doi.org/10.55591/001c.22519>

Romito B., Jewell J., Jackson M., AAP Committee On Hospital Care; Association Of Child Life Professionals. Child Life Services. Pediatrics. 2021;147(1):e2020040261

Turner, J. (2018). Theoretical Foundations of Child Life Practice. (pp.34-54). In R. H. Thompson's (Ed.), The Handbook of Child Life (2nd ed.). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishing.

Watch in class:

Robertson, J. (Director). (1958). Going to Hospital With Mother. [Film]. Concord Media

Reflection journal 2 due September 7

Wednesday September 10

Class 3: Communication, Trust, and Compassion

Readings

Burke Harris, N. (2014, September). Nadine Burke Harris: How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_life_time?language=en

Klinzing, D.G. & Klinzing, D. (2018). Communication and Child Life. (pp. 136-160).). In R. H. Thompson's (Ed.), *The Handbook of Child Life* (2nd ed.). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishing.

Reflection journal 3 due September 14

Wednesday September 17

Class 4: Patient and Family Centered Care

Readings

Cross, J.N., Desai, P.P., Palm, J., Bell, J.L., Johnson, B.H., & McLeod, S.M. (2018). Patient- and Family-Centered Care and the Implications for Child Life Practice. (pp. 492-526). In R. H. Thompson's (Ed.), *The Handbook of Child Life* (2nd ed.). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishing.

McCue, K. (2018). Therapeutic Relationships in Child Life. (pp. 104-135). In R. H. Thompson's (Ed.), *The Handbook of Child Life* (2nd ed.). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishing.

Visit and become familiar with the Institute For Patient-and Family-Centered Care Institute website <https://www.ipfcc.org>

Reflection journal 4 due September 21

Wednesday September 24

Class 5: The Power of Play

Readings

Jessee, P.O., & Gaynard, L. (2018). Paradigms of play. (pp. 230-267). In R. H. Thompson's (Ed.), *The Handbook of Child Life* (2nd ed.). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishing.

Watch Video:

Tedx Talks. (2016, September). *Fun in the Face of Crisis I Michael Towne I TedxPeacePlaza* [Video].

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_Kvedokrpw

Reflection journal 5 due September 28

Wednesday October 1

Class 6: Medical/Health Related Play and Therapeutic Play

Readings

Grissim, L., Kirkendall, M., Jones, M., & Boles, J. (2020). Group Medical Play and Children's Self-Reported Fear in the Pre-Operative Setting. *The Journal of Child Life: Psychosocial Theory and Practice*, 1(2), 7–15. <https://doi.org/10.55591/001c.22527>

Wong, C.L., Ip, W.Y., Kwok, B.M.C., Choi, K.C., Ng, B.K., & Chan, C.W.H. (2018). Effects of therapeutic play on children undergoing cast-removal procedures: A randomized controlled trial. *BMJ Open*, 8(7), 1-10. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2017-021071>

Reflection journal 6 due October 5

Wednesday October 8

Class 7: Assessment

Hollon, E., Clark, E., LeBlanc, C., & Skinner L. (2018). Assessment and Documentation in Child Life. (pp. 195-229). In R. H. Thompson's (Ed.), *The Handbook of Child Life* (2nd ed.). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishing.

Reflection journal 7 due October 12

Wednesday October 15

Class 8: Preparation and Coping

Readings

Goldberger, J., Mohl, A. L. & Thompson, R. H. (2018). Psychological preparation and coping. (pp.268-316). In R. H. Thompson's (Ed.), *The Handbook of Child Life* (2nd ed.). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishing.

Watch in class

Kuttner, L. (Director). (2011). *No Fears, No Tears: 13 Years Later*. [Film]. Crowne House Publishing.

Reflection journal 8 due October 19

Wednesday October 22

Class 9: Emotional Safety

Readings

Association of Child Life Professionals. (2021). Emotional Safety Initiative.

<https://emotional-safety.org>

Murphy, L. M., & King, E. K. (2024). The Lived Experiences of First Responders During Emergency Events Involving Children: Child Reactions, First Responder Roles, and Additional Needs. *The Journal of Child Life: Psychosocial Theory and Practice*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.55591/001c.126258>

Reflection journal 9 due October 26

Wednesday October 29

Class 10: Child Life and Compassionate Care in the Emergency Department

Readings

Squires, V.L. & Allen, K.E. (2018). The Emergency Department and Ambulatory Care. (pp. 492-526). In R. H. Thompson's (Ed.), *The Handbook of Child Life* (2nd ed.). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishing.

Proposed topic for final presentation due October 29

Reflection journal 10 due November 2

Wednesday November 5

Class 11: Child Life Interventions and Compassionate Care in Intensive Care

Readings

Pearson, L.J. (2018). Child Life Interventions in Critical Care and at the End of Life. (pp. 392-419). In R. H. Thompson's (Ed.), *The Handbook of Child Life* (2nd ed.). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishing.

Reflection journal 11 due November 9

Wednesday November 12

Class 12: Working with Grieving Children and Families

Readings

Brown, C. (2018). Working with Grieving Children and Families. (pp. 420-445). In R. H. Thompson's (Ed.), The Handbook of Child Life (2nd ed.). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishing.

Reflection journal 12 due November 16

10-page paper due November 12

Wednesday November 19

Class 13: Child Life and Compassionate Care Around the World

Readings

Desai, P.P., Crowell-Petrungaro, T., Moltman, M., & Fenn, L.D. (2018). Child Life: A Global Perspective. (pp. 572-609) In R. H. Thompson's (Ed.), The Handbook of Child Life (2nd ed.). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishing.

Matthiesen, A., Gerlach, A. J., Koller, D., & Moola, F. J. (2024). Complicating 'Voice' and 'Choice': The Role of Child Life Specialists in Shaping Children's Health Care Participation Rights in the Netherlands. The Journal of Child Life: Psychosocial Theory and Practice, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.55591/001c.91122>

Wittenberg, B., & Stickley, Y. (2020). The Role of the Certified Child Life Specialist With Adolescent and Young Adult Patients in Japanese Hospitals. The Journal of Child Life: Psychosocial Theory and Practice, 1(1), 25–39. <https://doi.org/10.55591/001c.22517>

Reflection journal 13 due November 23

Wednesday November 26

No Class: Thanksgiving Break

Wednesday December 3

Class 14: Final Presentations

Reflection journal 14 due December 7

Assessments

Assessment/Assignment/Exam	Points or Percentage	Due Date
Attendance, Class Participation, and Weekly Reflection Journal	30	Ongoing
10-Page Paper	40	11/12
Final Presentation	30	12/3
Total	100	

Submit all assignments to the class instructor through email at michael.attard@stonybrookmedicine.edu

Class Participation

Attendance and participation are critical elements of this course, as they foster a lively learning environment. We expect active engagement throughout the entirety of the course.

Reflection Journal

Keep a weekly reflection journal in your own words highlighting key takeaways from each class. Don't just summarize- analyze and reflect. What did you learn that deepened your understanding of the subject matter? How did the material connect to what you already knew? What ideas, theories, or concepts challenged your thinking? What resonated most with you, and why? Reflect on your growth as a practitioner and a scholar. Share your emotional responses to the subject matter. This is the time to let it flow.

Reflection journal entries are expected to be 300-500 words in length, due Sundays by 11:00 PM EST.

10-Page Paper

This paper is designed to deepen your understanding of the child life profession and the role of compassionate care in supporting patients and their families. You will critically examine theory, practice, and strategies that foster resilience, emotional well-being, and trust throughout the healthcare experience. Make your compelling argument for child life and compassionate care! You will be graded on content depth and critical thinking, organization and clarity, use of evidence, relevance and insight, and APA formatting. 10 pages, excluding title and reference pages. Utilize size 12 font. 1-inch margins. Double-spaced. A minimum of 5 references from academic sources.

Final Presentation

This assignment challenges you to take on the role of an advocate, using real world examples and evidence-based practice to champion the importance of compassionate care in healthcare. Who are the stakeholders in the process? What measures may be taken to champion this effort?

15-20 minute live presentation using Powerpoint or Google Slides. Allow an additional 5-10 minutes for class discussion and engagement.

Required presentation components:

12-15 slides, excluding title and references. Introduction, background and context, importance and impact, challenges and barriers, advocacy plan, and conclusion. References- minimum of 4 academic sources.

Submit your proposed topic for approval by October 29th. Only one topic area per student.

Send file to class instructor on 12/2

MA Program Attendance Policy

Most courses for the Master's program in Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care and Bioethics are held in-person; those that are primarily offered virtually will be clearly indicated. In both cases, attendance is required.

For students in the joint MD/MA program, exceptional clinical requirements may necessitate a remedial arrangement to attend two or possibly three class sessions remotely, as discussed with the course instructor at the beginning of the semester. MD/MA students who are joining

the class virtually will be expected to utilize a desktop, laptop, or tablet computer with audio, video, and screen sharing capabilities in a location that is distraction free. (Seminar sessions are not recorded).

Absences must be remediated as the instructor designates and will include timely completion of all scheduled reading and written assignments as well as additional instructor-determined requirements.

Any questions regarding this policy should be brought to the attention of the course instructor and, as necessary, to the MA Program Directors (Drs. Post and Basile).

Make-Up Work

If you must miss a class, you are responsible for making up any missed content. Notify the instructor in advance about the absence. Failure to complete the reflection journal may result in a deduction from your attendance and class participation grade (30% of your final grade).

Student Success Resources: How to Be a Successful Student in This Course

There are multiple resources, university offices, and help desks that are available to assist you with everything from advising, tutoring, accessibility and much more.

Review some [Academic Success Strategies](#) and visit the [Student Resources](#) page for links to resources on campus.

Wellness & Support Statement

Stony Brook values student well-being, including mental health, and recognizes that a variety of factors can impact emotional wellness and academic success including stress, anxiety, depression, substance use, sexual violence, family or relationship concerns, and political conflict. [Resources are available](#) if you experience challenges or wellness concerns that affect your ability to be successful in class, and you are encouraged to reach out for help when you need it.

In the event of a short-term absence from class, students are encouraged to communicate immediately and work directly with instructors. However, if a student is struggling with an extended absence due a hospitalization, family illness or death, they are encouraged to reach out to the Student Support Team.

Technical Requirements and Assistance

[D2L Brightspace](#) is Stony Brook University's digital learning environment. It is used for the facilitation of communications between faculty and students, submission of assignments, and secure posting of grades and feedback in your courses. To [access Brightspace](#), go to mycourses.stonybrook.edu and use your SBU NetID and password. If you are unsure of your NetID, visit [Finding Your NetID and Password](#) for more information.

Sometimes submitting coursework via a tablet and/or mobile device can be challenging. Computers equipped with the appropriate software are available for use at the various [SINC site computer labs](#). Both physical and virtual labs are available. You can also borrow a computer through [SBU's Laptop Loan Program](#).

Visit the [Technical Requirements page](#) for additional information regarding hardware and software options.

Please use the following information if you need technical assistance at any time during the course or to report a problem with Brightspace:

Brightspace Support via SUNY Helpdesk

- Phone: 1-844-673-6786
- Submit a [ticket or chat online](#)

Stony Brook University: Academic Technology Services

- Phone: 631-632-9800
- Email: AcademicTechnologies@stonybrook.edu

Privacy Policies

This course utilizes various educational technologies to enhance the learning experience. You can access links to the [privacy policies](#) of the tools and platforms used at Stony Brook University on the Syllabus Addendum webpage.

Student Accessibility Support Center Statement

If you have a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact the Student Accessibility Support Center, Stony Brook Union Suite 107, (631) 632-6748, or at sasc@stonybrook.edu. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

Students who require assistance during emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and the Student Accessibility Support Center. For procedures and information go to the following website: <https://ehs.stonybrook.edu//programs/fire-safety/emergency-evacuation/evacuation-guide-disabilities> and search Fire Safety and Evacuation and Disabilities.

Academic Integrity Statement

Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person's work as your own is always wrong. Faculty is required to report any suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the Academic Judiciary. Faculty in the Health Sciences Center (School of Health Professions, Nursing, Social Welfare, Dental Medicine) and School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of

academic dishonesty please refer to the academic judiciary website at http://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/academic_integrity/index.html

Critical Incident Management

Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students' ability to learn. Faculty in the HSC Schools and the School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures. Further information about most academic matters can be found in the Undergraduate Bulletin, the Undergraduate Class Schedule, and the Faculty-Employee Handbook.

Understand When You May Drop This Course

If you need to drop or withdraw from the course, it is your responsibility to be aware of the tuition liability deadlines listed on the registrar's [Academic Calendar](#). Before making the decision to drop/withdraw you may want to [contact me or] refer to the University's policies:

- [Undergraduate Course Load and Course Withdrawal Policy](#)
- [Graduate Course Changes Policy](#)

Incomplete Policy

Under emergency/special circumstances, students may petition for an incomplete grade. Circumstances must be documented and significant enough to merit an incomplete. If you need to request an incomplete for this course, contact me for approval as far in advance as possible. You should also read the University's policies that apply to you:

[Undergraduate Bulletin](#)

[Graduate Bulletin](#)

Course Materials and Copyright Statement

Course material accessed from Brightspace, Zoom, Echo 360, VoiceThread, etc. is for the exclusive use of students who are currently enrolled in the course. Content from these systems cannot be reused or distributed without written permission of the instructor and/or the copyright holder. Duplication of materials protected by copyright, without permission of the copyright holder is a violation of the Federal copyright law, as well as a violation of Stony Brook's Academic Integrity.