

# Chapter 2

## Simulation

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Simulation helps learners conceptualize and apply knowledge through experiential learning and shared reflection. Children and families, as well as professionals who work with these populations, can benefit from simulation-based education. Child life specialists' skills in interprofessional collaboration, developmentally appropriate language and preparation, child- and family-centered care, and emotional safety provide them with a solid foundation as simulation educators and facilitators. By developing their knowledge of the learning theories underpinning simulation as well as scenario design, simulation environments and modalities, psychological safety, and debriefing, child life specialists can incorporate simulation into their roles. This chapter provides an overview of simulation concepts and methods while exploring the intersection of simulation with child life practice. The chapter also identifies ways that child life specialists can contribute to simulations for children and youth, parents and caregivers, child life students and professionals, and interprofessional teams.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Child life professionals frequently incorporate experiential learning for children, youth, and families into their clinical work. Children and youth learn from developmentally-appropriate play and exploration, and parents and caregivers may increase their own understanding of their children's experiences by participating in these common child life interventions with them. But what if there are ways to elevate experiential learning further? What if developmental theory and learning theory can be combined to optimize the experiential learning opportunities offered to learners across the lifespan? Simulation-based education offers such innovations.

Simulation is "a technique - not a technology - to replace or amplify real experiences with guided experiences that evoke or replicate substantial aspects of the real world in a fully interactive manner" (Gaba, 2004, p. i2). It is widely used for educating healthcare professionals, and increasingly, for educating children, youth, and families. Child life specialists already possess many of the competencies of an

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effective simulation educator and facilitator, including the commitment to reflective practice, ability to assess a learner's needs and design developmentally appropriate interventions in response, proficiency with learner-centered communication skills, and ability to build trust and rapport while supporting healthy responses to stressful events (Association of Child Life Professionals, 2019). This overlap introduces invaluable opportunities for child life specialists to incorporate simulation into their practice (either in healthcare or elsewhere) and contribute to the growth of simulation education and science.

This chapter will:

- Examine child life involvement in simulation-based education and opportunities for future growth
- Introduce foundational elements of simulation, including learning theories, scenario development, simulation environments and modalities, psychological safety, and debriefing
- Connect simulation methodology and the Child Life Competencies, identifying areas of overlap
- Evaluate the value that child life specialists bring to simulation-based education, as well as the value that simulation brings to child life practice

## **BACKGROUND**

Simulation is distinct from other forms of education and preparation due to its focus on experiential learning coupled with *debriefing* (guided reflection that supports integrating learning into action) in environments constructed to establish and maintain *psychological safety* (the sense that the environment is favorable to interpersonal risk-taking) (Edmondson, 1999; Rudolph et al., 2014; Sawyer et al., 2016). Facilitators coordinate the simulation scenario and lead the debrief. The facilitators may also lead a *prebrief* before a simulation to orient the learners and help them know what to expect.

Simulation-based education can be adapted to a wide variety of environments and learner needs. This flexibility makes simulation a valuable learning tool for children, youth, and adults alike. Incorporating simulation into child life practice is a progression of the profession's commitment to "identify teaching techniques for use with individuals of diverse developmental levels and learning needs" (Association of Child Life Professionals, 2019, p. 4). By offering opportunities to learn through simulation, child life specialists can meet a greater range of needs within the populations they serve.

Furthermore, child life specialists must "identify adult learning needs" (Association of Child Life Professionals, 2019, p. 6) and offer safe, responsive, and effective educational opportunities for child life learners, including child life students and interns. Simulation is an essential modality to use with child life learners. When used with learners from medical and nursing professions, simulation-based education can improve the learners' competence and confidence, as well as diagnostic and treatment processes (Auerbach et al., 2016; Lateef, 2010; Moslehi et al., 2022; Theilen et al., 2017). Such improvements help optimize patients' physical safety. Child life specialists advocate for the emotional safety of children and families to be valued and addressed alongside physical safety (Association of Child Life Professionals, 2019; Gordon, 2021). Therefore, it is ethical for child life specialists to use simulation when teaching child life learners to navigate encounters in which children and families are emotionally vulnerable. This use of simulation-based education protects children and families while upholding child life specialists' accountability for the training and supervision of others (Association of Child Life Professionals, 2020).

Child life specialists are obligated to teach not only child life learners, but to educate learners from other professions by sharing knowledge of the psychosocial needs of children, youth, and families (As-

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