

## How to Become Certified in Family Life Education

Family Life Education is the practice of equipping and empowering family members to develop knowledge and skills that enhance well-being and strengthen interpersonal relationships through an educational, preventive, and strengths-based approach. Family Life Educators can obtain the Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE) credential through the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR). The CFLE credential was established and introduced in 1985 in order to establish standards of practice and increase recognition of Family Life Education. The CFLE credential is the nationally recognized standard in Family Life Education and validates a professional's experience and knowledge as a Family Life Educator (National Council on Family Relations, 2019b).

There are many areas and contexts in which Certified Family Life Educators can work, including home visiting, program development, advocacy, community education, academic teaching, administration, health services, journalism, ministry, research, social work, human services, and so much more. In addition to the areas where Certified Family Life Educators work, survey results from the National Council on Family Relations Certified Family Life Educator 2014 job analysis report of CFLEs show that CFLEs work in a variety of organizational sectors including government entities, for-profits, and nonprofits (National Council on Family Relations, 2014). There are additionally CFLEs who are self-employed and own their own business. Results from the survey further demonstrate that CFLEs mainly focus on prevention and/or education, but some also focus on intervention or other methods. CFLEs can work one-on-one with individuals or present to large groups. There are CFLEs in every state and all over the world who work in a variety of settings. What unites them is the Certified Family Life Educator credential that verifies that they meet a nationally recognized standard for the practice of Family Life Education. Following are directions and guidelines for how to become a CFLE.

There are two steps to becoming a Certified Family Life Educator: demonstrating knowledge in the 10 Family Life Education content areas and demonstrating work experience in Family Life Education. The minimum requirement for all Certified Family Life Educator applicants is a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university. All applicants who earned a degree from outside of the United States must provide evidence of degree equivalency by an official credential evaluation service.

### **Provisional Certification**

The first level of this credential is provisional certification, which is for applicants who can demonstrate knowledge in the 10 content areas of Family Life Education. This is the best option for applicants who are ready to become certified, but do not have enough work experience in Family Life Education for full certification. There are many reasons someone may want to be provisionally certified rather than applying for the full certification. Examples include students who have just graduated, people who are making a career change, or people who have no or only a partial amount of work experience in Family Life Education. Provisional Certification also provides a helpful edge when interviewing for Family Life Education jobs.

There are two ways for applicants to demonstrate they have knowledge in Family Life Education: they can graduate from a CFLE-approved program or they can take the CFLE exam. Both processes will be described in detail in the following paragraphs.

### **CFLE-Approved Program Application**

One of the two ways to demonstrate knowledge in Family Life Education is to graduate from a CFLE-approved program. This is an excellent option for anyone who is currently looking to attend a college or university relating to Family Science or for students who have already graduated from a CFLE-approved program. There are over 125 colleges and universities located throughout the United States that offer online and/or on-campus CFLE-approved programs. Program degree levels include bachelor of arts, bachelor of science, master's, and doctoral programs that offer a variety of majors, including but not limited to Family Science, Family Life Education, human development, and many more. In order to become CFLE-approved, these programs worked closely with NCFE to review their curricula to ensure that their offered courses meet the standards of each of the 10 content areas. In addition to completion of coursework in each of the 10 content

areas, there is also a Family Life Education internship or practicum requirement that an applicant must complete while in school. The end result of this curriculum review is a checklist unique to each school and organized by content areas that shows which course(s) a student must take in order to become approved.

Applicants who wish to apply through the CFLE-approved program application must do so within two years of graduation to ensure that their coursework is current. The application itself consists of submitting some basic demographic information and paying an application fee. Applicants must also sign the CFLE Code of Professional Ethics, which is a set of ethical guidelines that all CFLEs are expected to follow as a guide during their Family Life Education work. In addition, applicants must also submit an official transcript demonstrating successful coursework completion. All coursework must be completed with a C- or better. In addition to an application form, applicants must fill out the CFLE-approved program checklist from their school to ensure all the courses have been completed. Another important caveat is that the oldest course on the checklist needs to have been completed no more than seven years prior to the student's graduation date. It is important to note that most checklists include courses that may not be required for the major. It is advised that students carefully look over the checklist as they complete their coursework to ensure that they are meeting all the requirements to become certified.

A student is allowed two substitute courses on the CFLE-approved program checklist. For a substitute course to be approved, it must cover content similar to content from the course that is missing. The NCFR website offers greater detail of required material that must be covered for each content area. If the substitute course was taken at another college or university, a student must submit a syllabus from the year and semester the course was taken. This can be reviewed and approved at the NCFR office before the student takes the course or before the person applies. If the applicant did not complete the internship or practicum listed on the checklist, but has relevant work experience, they can substitute that work experience for the internship or practicum by submitting a work experience summary form and employer assessment and verification form. This paperwork can be obtained by contacting the NCFR office directly. Please see the NCFR contact information listed in the last paragraph of this appendix.

## **CFLE Exam Application**

Another method to demonstrate knowledge in Family Life Education is to take the CFLE exam. This is an excellent option for anyone who did not graduate from a CFLE-approved program but has at least a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution. This is also a great option for applicants who did graduate from a CFLE-approved program but did not apply within two years of their graduation date or did not complete all the courses on the checklist.

The CFLE exam consists of 150 multiple choice questions covering all 10 content areas. The 10 content areas are covered almost equally, but an applicant can see a breakdown of the percentage of test questions pertaining to each content area on the NCFR website. The exam is offered during testing windows at computer-based testing sites located throughout the United States and the world. The exam is also offered onsite at the NCFR Annual Conference, which is usually held in November of each year. The applicant is responsible for preparing to take the exam, but NCFR does offer a variety of study materials on its website, including suggested readings, sample study guides, sample test questions, and instructions for how to join an exam study group.

The exam application consists of submitting basic demographic information, paying an application fee, and signing the CFLE Code of Professional Ethics. The applicant must also submit an official transcript to show that they graduated with the minimum of a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited university or college.

## **Full Certification**

Applicants who have both knowledge and work experience in Family Life Education are eligible for full certification. For full certification, applicants must demonstrate they have knowledge in Family Life Education by using one of the two methods listed in the paragraphs above — by applying through the CFLE-approved program process or by taking the CFLE exam — and then also by documenting work experience in Family Life Education. As has been discussed, the practice of Family Life Education includes a variety of activities. Those eligible to count as Family Life Education work experience for the purpose of the CFLE credential include but are not limited to: program coordination/administration; program evaluation; needs assessments; marketing of Family Life Education materials and programs; curriculum or resource development; publications; presentations; group facilitation; or community collaboration.

There is a variety of criteria used when assessing relevant Family Life Education work experience. For one, the work must be related to at least one or more of the 10 Family Life Education content areas. The work must also be preventive and educational in nature rather than interventive or therapeutic. Additionally, the work must focus on normal family stressors rather than current trauma. In relation to this, the Family Life Educator must work to develop skills and abilities. The work should be intentional; there should be some sort of planned curriculum, program, or lesson involved. Also, the work experience must consider the family as a whole, even if the Certified Family Life Educator is working only with an individual. Other items to note are that the majority of the work should have been performed within the past five years. Unpaid work experience, including volunteering and internships, can be included in work experience. Work earned before graduation may also be considered but must be in addition to post-graduation work.

The application process for full certification requires the applicant to submit a work experience review fee and a summary of their Family Life Education work experience, including information such as job title, organization name, Family Life Education activity description, employment dates, content areas addressed, and total number of hours. The number of work experience hours needed depends on the level and type of degree. Applicants with a doctoral or master’s family degree must earn 1,600 hours; applicants with a bachelor’s family degree must earn 3,200 hours; and applicants of any degree level with any other major must earn 4,800 hours (Please see table 1 below, National Council on Family Relations, 2019). Another item needed is examples of work experience in Family Life Education, including but not limited to course outlines/syllabi, brochures, handouts, worksheets, table of contents for curriculum, publications, etc. Applicants are requested to send one to three examples of work experience per job listed.

*Table 1: Requirements for full certification*

<b>Requirements for full certification</b>	<b>Bachelor's degree</b>	<b>Master's or Ph.D.</b>
<b>Family degree</b>	3,200 hours work experience	1,600 hours work experience
<b>Non-family degree</b>	4,800 hours work experience for bachelor's, master's, or Ph.D.	

*Note: National Council on Family Relations, 2019a*

The last item needed in order to apply for full certification is an employer assessment and verification form completed by an employer, supervisor, or colleague. If the applicant is self-employed, they can have an employee or client fill out the verification. The employer verification confirms that the information submitted about the applicant's job title, number of hours worked, and employment dates is accurate. In addition, the employer is asked to rate an applicant's knowledge in the 10 content areas and assess a variety of skills, including ethical decision-making, problem-solving, communication, and more. While the preference is to have all work experience verified by an employer or set of employers, applicants must verify at minimum 50% of total work experience with an employer, or with a set of employers if the applicant has had multiple jobs.

### **Maintaining the CFLE credential**

It is important to note that there are requirements for maintaining this certification. Every year, there is an annual maintenance fee that covers the costs of the CFLE newsletter *Network*, CFLE discussion group, and general maintenance of the CFLE program. In addition, provisional CFLEs must upgrade to full certification once they earn sufficient work experience in Family Life Education. People who are provisionally certified must upgrade within five years of original approval.

CFLEs with full certification must recertify every five years to show that they are staying current in the field. In order to recertify, CFLEs must submit 100 hours of continuing education credit in relevant academic preparation, work experience, and/or professional development.

### **Benefits of Becoming a CFLE**

It is clear that time and effort is needed to become a Certified Family Life Educator. Fortunately, there are many benefits to the credential, including increasing one's credibility as a Family Life Educator. Having this certification means one can market to employers, clients, and other stakeholders that they meet a nationally recognized standard in Family Life Education. Having this credential also helps validate one's education and experience. In addition, all CFLEs have access to a CFLE discussion group and CFLE directory, which allow CFLEs to share resources, ask important questions about the practice of Family Life Education, network, and so much more. There are also a variety of other social media platforms that CFLEs can use to stay connected. In addition to the many networking opportunities, there are also leadership positions for CFLEs, including serving

as chair of the CFLE Advisory Board and CFLE Exam Committee. The quarterly newsletter, *Network*, keeps CFLEs updated on research, provides resources CFLEs can use, and demonstrates how others with the certification are making a difference in their communities.

Certified Family Life Educators make an important contribution to society by equipping and empowering families to reach their full potential. For more information on how to become a CFLE, please visit our website at [ncfr.org/cfle](http://ncfr.org/cfle).

## References

National Council on Family Relations (2014). *National Council on Family Relations Certified Family Life Educator 2014 job analysis report*. Unpublished Job Analysis Report.

National Council on Family Relations (2019a). *Requirements for full certification* [Table]. Retrieved from <https://www.ncfr.org/cfle-certification/become-certified/work-experience-full-certification>

National Council on Family Relations (2019b). *What is Family Life Education?* Retrieved from <https://www.ncfr.org/cfle-certification/what-family-life-education>