



# Early Childhood Conference

Concordia Early Childhood Conference

June 1-2, 2025

Theme: Anchored!

*"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."* Hebrews 6:19

## **Early-Bird Registration Costs – If registered before May 15th:**

Sunday-only Conference (includes Sunday Keynote Dinner): \$45.00 (after May 15: \$55)

Monday-only Conference (does not include lunch): \$55.00 (after May 15: \$65)

Full Conference (includes Sunday and Monday): \$85.00 (after May 15: \$100)

Monday Box Lunches will be available for purchase (pre-registration and payment). Other lunch options are available throughout Seward.

## **Clock Hours:**

Sunday-only participants will receive a certificate of attendance for 4 clock hours of professional development.

Monday-only participants will receive a certificate of attendance for 7 clock hours of professional development.

Full Conference participants will receive a certificate of attendance for 11 clock hours of professional development.

## **Featured Conference Speaker – Dr. Kim Marxhausen**

Kim has been an early childhood educator for more than twenty-five years. She currently teaches cognition and creativity at the University of Nebraska/Lincoln. She's tried a little bit of everything, including speaking, blogs, parenting newsletters, writing children's Christmas services, and publishing

three books. Still, her most satisfying work is serving and learning from teachers. Her latest book comes from her years as a caregiver: *Weary Joy: The Caregiver's Journey*.

**Conference Schedule:**

<b>Sunday, June 1</b>		
Registration	1:30 – 2:30 PM	THOM Lobby
Scholastic Book Fair Open	1:30 – 5:00 PM	THOM Classroom
Session A	2:30 – 3:30 PM	Various Locations
Session B	3:45 – 4:45 PM	Various Locations
Socialization & Appetizers	4:45 – 5:15 PM	Janzow Campus Center
Keynote Dinner Speaker	5:15 – 7:00 PM	Janzow Campus Center
Optional Evening Socialization (on own)		Various location options will be noted
<b>Monday, June 2</b>		
Registration Continues	7:45 – 8:30 AM	THOM Lobby
Coffee & Pastries	7:45 – 8:30 AM	THOM Main Street
Vendors, Exhibits, Scholastic Book Fair	7:45 – 3:45 PM	THOM Main Street
Welcome & Morning Keynote	8:45 – 10:30 AM	Janzow Campus Center
Session C	10:45 – 11:45 AM	Various Locations
Lunch	Noon – 1:00 PM	Janzow Campus Center
Afternoon Keynote	1:00 – 2:30 PM	Janzow Campus Center
Session D	2:45 – 3:45 PM	Various Locations

**Sunday, June 1**

**Registration, Exhibits, and Book Fair (1:30 – 2:30 PM)**

**Book Fair is open until 5:00 PM.**

**Session A (2:30 – 3:30 PM)**

**A1 – Childhood Confidence and Creativity**

Dr. Kim Marxhausen, Featured Conference Keynote Speaker

Creativity flourishes in a child with a confident temperament, and confidence finds its training ground in creativity. Let’s look at how creativity and confidence are woven together in the process of developing a child’s mind and heart.

## **A2 – Cultivating Professionalism in Early Childhood Education**

Chad Bryant, Director, Christ Lutheran Childcare, Norfolk, NE

Early childhood education is receiving more national attention than ever before. As a field, we've long worked to be recognized as a profession, and now is the time to seize that opportunity. To be treated as professionals, we must cultivate environments that nurture and support professional growth. In this session, we will explore what it means to be a professional in the field and discuss how leaders can actively foster professionalism in their workplaces. This session will highlight how every staff member—regardless of their role—can play a part in leading the charge toward a more professional and respected field.

## **A3 - Mindfulness and the Educator: Is this for real AND is God okay with it?!**

Rachel Hinze, Early Childhood Educator, Lincoln, NE

Mindfulness and Reflective Practice are incredible tools for effective, engaged and regulated educators. The benefits for educators and their students range from a reduction in stress to social emotional learning and beyond. We will introduce mindfulness for the educator by sampling portions of CHIME (Cultivating Healthy Intentional Mindful Educators) created by UNL extension, and explore what God's word says about mindfulness.

## **A4 – Practical Matters: Tips and Strategies for a Smooth-Running Preschool Classroom**

Lauren Sommerer, Teacher, St. John Lutheran Child Development Center, Seward, NE

With over 30 years of experience in early childhood education, I've gathered ideas on what truly makes a preschool classroom run smoothly. In this session, I'll share some of my tried-and-true strategies and practical tips for everything from setting up your classroom environment to fostering positive, meaningful interactions with children. Come ready to share some of your own ideas, too!

## **Session B (3:45 – 4:45 PM)**

### **B1 – Different Children, Different Instruction**

Dr. Drew Gerdes, Director of Undergraduate Early Childhood Education, Concordia University, Nebraska

Every early childhood classroom should feature a "buffet of learning" where each student has voice and choice that allows learning and engagement at the highest level possible. What does it mean to differentiate teaching and learning for young children? What does it mean to really strive to look for and understand their strengths and needs? Join in the conversation and gain tips and strategies that could help enhance the level of FUN in your classroom – for your students and YOU!

## **B2 – Growing Together: The Power of Evaluations in Early Childhood**

Chad Bryant, Director, Christ Lutheran Childcare, Norfolk, NE

Join us for a thoughtful session on the impact of evaluations in the early childhood field! We'll explore how regular self-assessments can identify strengths and areas for growth, while feedback from colleagues and mentors enhances our practice. The session will also cover the importance of performance reviews and setting professional goals based on constructive feedback, helping us grow and improve as educators.

## **B3 - Flip the Script! Bring the Inside Out!!**

Rachel Hinze, Early Childhood Educator, Lincoln, NE

We know that taking our little learners outdoors is a great way to get the wiggles out, but are we selling ourselves (and them!) short? In this session, we are going to uncover the benefits of outdoor learning, explore the potential for outdoor learning and walk away with some practical ideas and resources to get started...or amplify what we already have in place!

## **B4 – Taste & Tour**

Hosted by St. John Lutheran Child Development Center, Seward, NE

Teachers always love to see classroom set-ups from other schools and glean ideas from other teachers. During this self-guided session, participants will receive a “scavenger hunt” list of items to consider as they view classrooms and environment set-up. What ideas can you replicate in your own classroom? What might you do to enhance student learning and engagement in your program? The CDC's new outdoor environment will also be open. Several CDC faculty and staff will be on-hand to answer questions. Snacks will be available, too, as you engage in this learning adventure!

## **B5 – Champions for Children**

Dr. Annette Anschutz, Graduate Program Director for Early Childhood Education, Concordia University

Cheryl Haun, Early Childhood Consultant, LCMS Missouri District and Graduate Program Instructor, Concordia University

Learn more about Concordia University Nebraska's new Early Childhood Initiative. Explore a variety of professional development opportunities for administrators, directors, teachers, paras, and teacher aides that focuses on leadership development, faith formation, play-based learning, developmentally appropriate practice, and authentic assessment. Discuss innovative paths to make equipping meaningful, accessible, and affordable for every early childhood staff.

### **Snacks, Social Time, and Fellowship (4:45 – 5:15 PM)**

Cattle Conference Room - Janzow Student Center

### **Dinner and Keynote with Dr. Kim Marxhausen (5:15 – 7:00 PM)**

Dinner will be served at approximately 5:30 PM. Enjoy time socializing with friends and colleagues. The Keynote will begin at approximately 6:15 PM.

#### **Anchored in Hope**

If we were artists or chefs, we would immediately see the results of our work. In teaching we get glimpses of success, but most of what we teach will bear fruit many years down the road. There are particular mindsets we can teach that promote healthy outcomes. In these practices, we anchor our teaching in hope.

#### **Optional Sunday Evening Event (on own)**

If you are staying in town and would enjoy getting together with other conference participants for additional social time, feel free to head to La Cocina in downtown Seward. Several members of the Conference Planning Committee will also be present.

## **Monday, June 2**

### **Registration (7:45 – 8:30 AM)**

### **Exhibits and Book Fair (Open until 4:00 PM)**

### **Conference Welcome & Morning Keynote – Dr. Kim Marxhausen (8:45 – 10:30 AM)**

#### **The Anxiety Antidote (Part 1)**

As early childhood educators, we find ourselves working with anxious parents raising anxious children. Anxiety in the classroom does little to promote learning or healthy emotional skills. To compete in the world of their future, our students need the opposite of the current situation. Evidence-based practice presents us with hefty tools to create the anxiety antidote in our classrooms and centers. Armed with those tools, we can make a difference.

## **Session C (10:45 – 11:45 AM)**

### **C1 – Cultivating Professionalism in Early Childhood Education**

Chad Bryant, Director, Christ Lutheran Childcare, Norfolk, NE

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### **C2 – Engaging Young Hearts in Faith**

Lisa Aring, Director, St. John Lutheran Child Development Center, Seward, NE

Jesus-time is more than reading Bible stories! Easy-to-use ideas for making Jesus-time meaningful for young children will be presented, along with some interactive Christian ideas to use when parents or grandparents come to your classroom.

### **C3 - Mindfulness and the Educator: Is this for real AND is God okay with it?!**

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Mindfulness and Reflective Practice are incredible tools for effective, engaged and regulated educators. The benefits for educators and their students range from a reduction in stress to social emotional learning and beyond. We will introduce mindfulness for the educator by sampling portions of CHIME (Cultivating Healthy Intentional Mindful Educators) created by UNL extension, and explore what God's word says about mindfulness.

### **C4 – Practical Matters: Tips and Strategies for a Smooth-Running Preschool Classroom**

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## **C5 – Recognizing, Responding, and Supporting: Autism Awareness in Early Childhood**

Jen Quaranta, Southeast Region Coordinator, NE ASD Network, ESU6

Early childhood educators play a crucial role in recognizing the early signs of autism and creating inclusive learning environments. This session will equip participants with practical strategies to identify early indicators of autism, support language and play development, and implement classroom strategies that foster success. Attendees will also gain valuable resources to guide families in navigating concerns about developmental differences. Join us to build confidence in supporting all learners!

## **C6 – Lights & Shadows**

Emily Manning, Assistant Extension Educator – Early Childhood, University of Nebraska – Lincoln

Fans of Nebraska Extension’s highly popular program *Block Party* will be excited about our latest program *Lights and Shadows*. *Lights and Shadows* inspires early childhood professionals to use light as a creative educational tool, fostering hands-on exploration and development. Participants will learn the benefits of light and shadow play, facilitation techniques, practical setup strategies, and how to create engaging family events.

## **Lunch (Noon – 1:00 PM)**

If you have pre-purchased a Box Lunch, you can redeem your Lunch Ticket for a lunch in the back of Cattle Conference Room

Other lunch options are available in Seward. Check with a member of the Planning Committee if you want to know of options.

## **Afternoon Keynote – Dr. Kim Marxhausen (1:00 – 2:30 PM)**

The Anxiety Antidote (Part 2)

As early childhood educators, we find ourselves working with anxious parents raising anxious children. Anxiety in the classroom does little to promote learning or healthy emotional skills. To compete in the world of their future, our students need the opposite of the current situation. Evidence-based practice presents us with hefty tools to create the anxiety antidote in our classrooms and centers. Armed with those tools, we can make a difference.

## **Session D (2:45 – 3:45 PM)**

### **D1 – Growing Together: The Power of Evaluations in Early Childhood**

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### **D2 – Toddlers Play To Learn**

Eunice McCarty, Early Childhood Consultant, LCMS Nebraska District

Participants will learn about stages of play for toddlers, why play is so important, how toys are their tools, and how to integrate spiritual nurturing throughout the day as "Toddlers Play to Learn".

### **D3 - Flip the Script! Bring the Inside Out!!**

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## **Wrap-Up**

Thank you for attending the 2025 Concordia Early Childhood Conference. We hope that you enjoyed learning and networking with other professionals.

Please exchange your lanyard at the Registration Table for a Certificate of Participation.

**Mark your calendar! Concordia Early Childhood Conference, June 7-8, 2026!**

Thank you to our event sponsors!



