

Community Institute for Psychotherapy
2026 Raising Healthy Families
Community Education Series



Parenting Teens in a Time of Risk: Understanding Development, Spotting Red Flags, and Responding to Substance Use

Presented by Dylan Kersh, LMFT & Gary Federoff

When: March 2, 2026, from 6 pm – 8 pm

Where: Marin County Office of Education, 1111 Las Gallinas Ave. San Rafael, CA & ZOOM

This free three-part presentation helps parents and caregivers better understand adolescent development, recognize early signs of concern—especially related to substance use—and gain practical tools for effective communication and support.

Part 1: The Teen Brain – What’s Going On in There?

Learn how adolescent brain development impacts behavior, emotional regulation, and risk-taking, including the increased vulnerability to substance use.

Part 2: What’s “Normal” vs. What’s a Red Flag?

Explore the line between typical teen behavior and signs of deeper issues. Through real-life examples, develop your ability to identify early warning signs and know when to be concerned.

Part 3: Tools for When Red Flags Are Present

Get actionable strategies for talking with teens, responding to concerns, and seeking appropriate support when needed.

Takeaway:

Gain clarity, confidence, and resources to better support your teen during these critical years.

Bio

Dylan Kersh is a Bay Area native with over a decade of experience teaching middle and high school students in Oakland, Maui, and Marin. His ability to connect with youth—especially those facing challenges like substance use, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem—led him to pursue a career in therapy. He currently maintains a private practice in San Rafael, serves as Director of Training at the Family Recovery Institute, and supervises interns at the Community Institute for Psychotherapy.

Gary Federoff has been a dedicated mentor and counselor for Marin County teens since 2003. From launching programs at the Novato Teen Center and creating skate camps to counseling teens in juvenile drug court and developing school-based prevention programs with Bay Area Community Resources, he brings deep experience and a strong connection to local youth. Gary holds a Master’s degree from Dominican University, is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT), and a California Advanced Alcohol and Drug Counselor (CAADC II). He lives in Mill Valley with his wife, Ryan—also an adolescent treatment professional—and their two children.



Starting the Conversation: Suicide, Stigma, and Support

Presented by Elisa Stern, M.A., M.Res. & Amelia Moser, M.A.

When: March 12, 2026, from 6 pm – 8 pm

Where: ZOOM ONLY

Recent research has indicated that one in five adolescents has seriously considered suicide in the past year. Talking about mental health and suicide can feel challenging, but given the increasing prevalence of such experiences, doing so is essential for building a supportive and informed community. Even if your child is not directly experiencing suicidal thoughts, it is likely that they will know a peer who is struggling, now or in the future. Knowing how to offer support in these moments can make all the difference. Suicide remains a complex and often stigmatized topic, yet open and proactive conversations can play a vital role in prevention. This talk will provide an overview of:

- Adolescent brain development and its relationship with mood and suicide risk, offering insight into why young people may experience emotional challenges in distinct ways
- Common misconceptions about suicide and strategies for reducing stigma
- Several practical tools to initiate and navigate conversations about suicide

By promoting awareness, fostering open dialogue, and providing evidence-based clinical strategies, this presentation aims to empower caregivers to approach these discussions with confidence and compassion, ensuring they can offer meaningful support when it is needed most.

Bio

Elisa Stern is a fourth-year doctoral student in Clinical Psychology and Neuroscience at the University of Colorado Boulder. Her research examines the etiology of adolescent mood and substance use disorders using statistical genetics and neuroimaging to explore the interplay of genetic risk, brain function, and environmental influences. Clinically, she is interested in bridging neuroscience and clinical practice to inform personalized treatment and prevention.

Amelia Moser is a doctoral student in Clinical Psychology and Neuroscience at the University of Colorado Boulder. Her research focuses on the biological bases of adolescent mood disorders, including how these disorders develop over time and neural correlates of treatment response as symptoms improve.



Call of the Wild: Helping Teens to Resist Extremist Political Ideologies

Presented by Mark Edwards, MFT

When: March 16, 2026, from 6 pm – 8 pm

Where: Marin County Office of Education, 1111 Las Gallinas Ave. San Rafael, CA & ZOOM

In an increasingly polarized world, extremist political ideologies are finding new ways to reach young people - often through digital platforms, online communities, and social media algorithms that target vulnerable youth. This engaging and informative two-hour seminar is designed for parents and caregivers who want to understand how to protect and empower their children in the face of these growing concerns.

Grounded in the latest research, this seminar explores why adolescents are particularly susceptible to extremist messaging, what warning signs to look for, and how to foster resilience, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence at home. Parents will learn practical strategies for maintaining open lines of communication, encouraging respectful dialogue, and building protective factors that reduce the likelihood of radicalization.

Participants will also gain insight into how extremist groups operate online, how algorithms can create echo chambers, and how to guide children through the digital landscape safely and confidently.

Whether your child is in elementary school or nearing adulthood, this seminar offers crucial knowledge and support for raising thoughtful, compassionate, and media-savvy young people.

Bio

Mark Edwards, MFT is a psychotherapist, trainer, teacher and consultant. He has maintained a private practice in San Rafael since 2000 and works with a broad client group of children, adolescents and adults. He has been a member of adjunct faculty of the Master's program in Counseling at Sonoma State University for more than 15 years and was formerly Assistant Clinical Director at the Community Institute for Psychotherapy where he continues to supervise and teach post-Master's and Predoctoral interns.

Emotional Suffering in Children & Teens: What Parents should Know and When to Act

Presented by Cheryl K. Best, Ph.D.



When: March 30, 2026, from 6 pm – 8 pm

Where: Marin County Office of Education, 1111 Las Gallinas Ave.
San Rafael, CA & ZOOM

Raising children is no easy task, and there's no manual to guide us. Children today face unique generational challenges that are increasing the prevalence of mental health crises. Drawing on research in developmental psychology and the onset of mental illness, Dr. Best will offer strategies for fostering resilience and emotional well-being in children. She will also highlight the signs of potential mental health crises and what steps parents can take to respond. In this presentation, you will learn

- Proven skills to support your child's emotional wellbeing
- How to recognize signs that your child is struggling with their mental health

- Strategies to talk to your child about the emotional distress they may be experiencing
- Steps to take when your child may be experiencing a mental health crisis

Bio

Dr. Cheryl Best is a psychologist at the Child Mind Institute. After earning her bachelor's degree in psychology at Harvard, she went on to obtain her PhD in clinical psychology from University at Albany in New York and completed her clinical training at the Stanford Child and Adolescent Psychology program. She specializes in working with children of all ages and families impacted by trauma and emotional disorders that lead to high-risk behaviors, including suicidality and self-harm. She is extensively trained in dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT) and provides parenting support for parents of emotionally sensitive children. She is particularly interested in how culture shapes psychological well-being and helping parents navigate the unique challenges of cycle-breaking from intergenerational trauma.