

Community Institute for Psychotherapy

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2025-2026 News & Notes



2026 January News and Notes

Think Positively for Health & Happiness in 2026

By Robin Joy Berenson, PhD, LMFT

*Most folks are as happy as they make up
their minds to be.*

~~ Abraham Lincoln



New Year's Greetings!

Today it's well known that thinking positively and maintaining an optimistic outlook is helpful in navigating our day-to-day lives, especially when confronting stressful situations and life's challenges. In recent years, research conducted in the field of Positive Psychology has shown that its impact on our wellbeing goes beyond even these benefits.

According to a recent article, "The Power of Positive Thinking on Health," published in *Science News Today*¹: "Far from being mere optimism or wishful thinking, [positive thinking] is a scientifically supported force that shapes our immune function, mental resilience, pain perception, disease management, and even longevity." We offer some highlights from that article in this edition of *News & Notes*.

Mark your Calendars!

As we enter the new year, we hope you will plan to join us for our **2026 Raising Healthy Families Community Educational Series**. The series, co-hosted by the Marin County Department of Education, will again focus on key issues affecting today's families and our community. Now in its eighth year, our **Raising Healthy Families** events will take place in March 2026. See below for a list of the presentations.

We hope you enjoy this monthly newsletter and will pass it along to family, friends, and colleagues who may also enjoy it. In the meantime, please let us hear from you with questions and comments.

Contact: Robin Joy Berenson, Executive and Clinical Director, at 415-459-5999 #100 or email: rjberenson@cipmarin.org.

All best wishes for the new year!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robin Joy Berenson".

Robin Joy Berenson, PhD, LMFT
Executive and Clinical Director

The Power of Positive Thinking

“There is no longer any doubt that what happens in the brain influences what happens in the body,” wrote *New York Times* health columnist Jane Brody² in her 2017 article, “A Positive Outlook May Be Good for Your Health.”

As if echoing that assertion, Muhammad Tuhin in 2025 reported, “What happens in our brain does not stay confined there—it travels through a network of hormones, neurons, and immune responses that ripple throughout the body. Positive thinking can trigger a cascade of biological effects that enhance resilience, speed recovery, and even lengthen life. Conversely, chronic negativity, stress, and pessimism may pave the way for disease and decline.”

His lengthy article, “The Power of Positive Thinking on Health,” Tuhin identifies many specific impacts of positive thinking’s role on health and wellbeing. Among them:

- Positive emotions and optimism are closely linked to enhanced immune responses.
- Positive thinkers tend to view stressful situations as challenges rather than threats.
- Optimism encourages the release of oxytocin, a hormone that promotes relaxation, social bonding, and cardiovascular health.
- Positive thinking improves resilience—the ability to bounce back from adversity.
- While positive thinking is not a cure, it complements medical treatment by empowering patients and improving overall health outcomes.

Positive Thinking as a Skill to Develop

Judith T. Moskowitz, PhD, MPH, has been the principal investigator on multiple studies that have confirmed the benefit of positive thinking on the health and wellbeing of such populations as newly diagnosed HIV patients, women with advanced breast cancer, and caregivers for dementia patients, as well as people with diabetes and other incurable illnesses.

Throughout her studies, Dr. Moskowitz found, “People can absolutely be taught to have positive emotions, even when things seem pretty bleak.³”

Dr. Moskowitz has identified eight specific skills that individuals can develop to increase their optimism and resilience. She recommends that individuals learn at least three of the skills and practice one or more each day.

- Recognize a positive event each day
- Savor that event and log it in a journal or tell someone about it.
- Start a daily gratitude journal.
- List a personal strength and note how you used it.
- Set an attainable goal and note your progress.
- Report a relatively minor stress and list ways to reappraise the event positively.
- Recognize and practice small acts of kindness daily.
- Practice mindfulness, focusing on the here and now rather than the past or future.

Limits to Positive Thinking?

Given such strong evidence of its healthful benefits, it is surprising to learn of a potential down side to positive thinking. According to Gabriele Oettingen, when you have a specific goal in mind, focusing only on the positive outcome and ignoring the challenges to achieving it, can be counterproductive. In her article, “The Problem with Positive Thinking,” she explains that she and her colleagues discovered that “dreaming about the future calms you down, measurably reducing systolic blood pressure, but it also can drain you of the energy you need to take action in pursuit of your goals⁴.”

Dr. Oettingen cites studies that have shown that participants who imagined how it would be to have attained their goal, in fact, were less successful in achieving it than those who did not. These studies included women in a weight reduction program, “college students wanting a date, hip-replacement patients hoping to get back on their feet, graduate students looking for a job, schoolchildren wishing to get good grades.”

The conclusion? “Fantasizing about happy outcomes — about smoothly attaining your wishes — didn’t help. Indeed, it hindered people from realizing their dreams.”

More effective in striving for a specific goal is mental contrasting. “Think of a wish. For a few minutes, imagine the wish coming true, letting your mind wander and drift where it

will. Then shift gears. Spend a few more minutes imagining the obstacles that stand in the way of realizing your wish.”



2026 Raising Healthy Families Community Educational Series

Co-hosted each year with the Marin County Office of Education, ***Raising Healthy Families*** programs provide the latest information by Bay Area experts on key issues facing families today. Taking place over four evenings in March, these hybrid events are free and open to the public.

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

Presented by Dylan Kersh, LMFT & Gary Federoff, M.S., LMFT, CADC II

When: March 2, 2026, from 6 pm – 8 pm

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

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

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

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

Presented by Cheryl K. Best, PhD

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

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

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