

Community Institute for Psychotherapy

1330 Lincoln Ave #201, San Rafael, CA 94901-2141
Phone (415) 459-5999 Fax (415) 459-5602 www.cipmarin.org

2025-2026 News & Notes



2026 March News and Notes

Why Your Child's "Big Feelings" Are Actually Healthy By Robin Joy Berenson, PhD, LMFT

“Children learn how to regulate their emotions through the calm presence of someone who cares.”

— *Daniel J. Siegel*



“Feelings are mentionable and manageable.”

— *Fred Rogers*

Why your Child's "Big Feelings" Are Actually Healthy!

Understanding emotional expression vs. emotional dysregulation

Many parents today worry that their child's intense emotions — tears over small disappointments, explosive frustration, or overwhelming worry — signal something is wrong. In reality, big feelings are not a sign of weakness or poor behavior. They are evidence of a developing emotional system learning how to navigate a complex world.

Children experience emotions with full intensity because their brains are still developing the capacity to regulate them. The parts of the brain responsible for impulse control and emotional regulation mature gradually into early adulthood. When a child melts down, it is rarely manipulation — it is often an overwhelmed nervous system seeking relief and safety.

It can help to distinguish between emotional expression and emotional dysregulation.

Emotional expression is healthy. It includes crying when sad, yelling when frustrated, or expressing fear when something feels uncertain. When children feel safe enough to express their emotions, they are learning that feelings can be tolerated, understood, and survived.

Emotional dysregulation occurs when feelings become so overwhelming that a child cannot calm themselves. This may look like prolonged tantrums, shutting down, aggression, or panic. Dysregulation is not misbehavior — it is a signal that the child needs support returning to a state of safety.

Parents play a crucial role in helping children move from overwhelm back to balance. This process is called co-regulation. Before children can regulate themselves, they borrow the calm nervous system of a trusted adult.

Simple responses can make a powerful difference:

- Stay close and grounded, even if your child is upset.
- Name what you see: “You’re really frustrated right now.”
- Offer reassurance: “I’m here. We’ll get through this together.”
- Set limits calmly when needed: “I can’t let you hit, but I can stay with you while you’re mad.”

When children feel seen and supported, their nervous systems begin to settle. Over time, these repeated experiences help them develop the internal capacity to regulate their own emotions.

Perhaps most importantly, big feelings give children opportunities to learn resilience. Each time they move through distress and return to calm with support, they build emotional strength and trust in relationships.

Parents do not need to eliminate big feelings. The goal is not to raise children who never feel deeply, but to raise children who learn that feelings are manageable, meaningful, and safe to share.

And in the process, children learn one of life’s most enduring lessons: they are not alone with what they feel.

Parent Takeaway

Big feelings are not a problem to fix — they are an opportunity to help your child feel understood, build regulation skills, and grow emotional resilience.

At the Community Institute for Psychotherapy (CIP), we provide affordable counseling and parent support to help families strengthen connection, navigate challenges, and foster emotional well-being. Learn more at www.cipmarin.org.

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.

Sincerely,



Robin Joy Berenson, PhD, LMFT
Executive and Clinical Director



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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Thank you to our generous 2025 sponsors!

