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You are listening to Supporting Supporters, a ChangetoChill podcast. This is a free mental well-being resource offered by Allina Health. My name is Tonya Freeman. I'm a licensed psychologist and regional lead psychologist with Allina Health.

These podcast episodes are aimed with the goal of providing quick, tangible resources and information from Allina Health mental health providers on a range of mental health topics relevant to day to day lives of the listener. We invite you to join us in any way you please, whether you sit back and kick your feet up, or as you engage in movement, your daily commute, or as you prepare for your day. However you choose to join us, we welcome you and we honor your time.

--- Episode ---

Hello there. I'm Heather Crabtree and I am a psychologist who works primarily with children, adolescents, and their families. In my work with clients and families I often partner with schools and also hear a lot from my clients about the impact that school personnel have on their lives. This is such an important and valued contribution to these children's lives and society as a whole. By listening to this podcast, it is obvious how much you care about your students and that you want to continue to develop your understanding and skills. Thank you for all you do. I hope this will be helpful for you.

This is the third podcast in our gratitude series and our focus will be on how to express gratitude directly to others. In previous podcasts we discussed the benefits of practicing gratitude and how to express gratitude through writing. This podcast we will explore other ways to directly express gratitude to others.

Without recapping the entirety of those podcasts, remember that directly expressing gratitude will not only this will improve your mood and the mood of the recipient! Benefits can last longer than you think- sometimes days to weeks after you express your gratitude towards another person! And expressing gratitude is best if done as a regular part of your day, make it part of your daily or weekly routine. This will make it easier to remember too.

First step is to think about the context- you want your expression of gratitude to fit the context and your relationship with the person. For example, taking your partner to their favorite restaurant to express gratitude for their support makes sense but it does not make sense as a way to express gratitude to a stranger for holding a door open for you.

Here are some general examples of how to express gratitude directly:

- Random acts of kindness. Random acts of kindness can yield substantial reward in terms of subjective well-being (Rowland & Curry, 2019). If you see a stranger struggling under a heavy load of shopping, offer a hand. Donate unwanted clothes to charity. Help someone lost with directions. The list is nigh inexhaustible!
- Be respectful. Maintain standards of etiquette in your day-to-day interactions with strangers. Just because you don't know them, it doesn't mean you should withhold the common courtesy you expect yourself. Hold the door open, respect their space, and be mindful of how your actions impact them.

- Tip your server. Going to the effort to make your experience a positive one, service-industry employees are often unsung heroes. In a fast-paced service environment, stopping a server to read them a gratitude letter isn't likely to be received well but dropping a tip in the jar (if you can afford to) lets the staff know you're thankful for their efforts.
- Volunteer in your community. Volunteering is not only a great way to connect with others and gain experience, it has also been found to increase subjective well-being and pose significant health benefits. Thoits and Hewitt (2001) found volunteer work to have a positive impact on elements of personal well-being. Those who undertook volunteering opportunities reported increased levels of happiness, life satisfaction, self-esteem, sense of control over life, physical health and lower levels of depression.

So those are some everyday ways to show gratitude toward strangers or people you run into in your day-to-day activities. But when we're thinking about people that we know and have relationships with in our lives, we can do things like:

1. Say the words!

This can be the most difficult one, because it's hard to directly say "I appreciate what you've done to me," but that can be really powerful and is the most direct way to express gratitude. So if this is hard for you, I would suggest practicing. Decide what you would want to say and even say it in the mirror and practice before you say it in real life. Or start with someone you feel comfortable with and work up from there.

2. Write a gratitude letter or note

Spend some time thinking about what you appreciate most about your friends, teacher, or parents and draft a letter by hand, expressing your sentiments. While recognizing your gratitude is important – just writing it down is enough to make you feel warm inside – actually reading the letter out loud is worth so much more.

Maybe jumping in with a full gratitude letter is too big a first step for you to make, that's OK! Why not try a thank you note in a thoughtfully selected or handmade card? While writing thank you notes is a bit of a lost art; it takes almost no time at all but is a sincere expression of gratitude.

3. Show gratitude through creative expression.

We can't all be talented artists, but it really is the thought and effort put in that counts. Often homemade gifts mean the most, a little bit of creativity goes a long way.

4. Give a gratitude gift

When choosing a gift aimed specifically at expressing gratitude, opt for meaningful over monetary value. Gratitude in itself is a gift but giving a thoughtful, personal gift that can be kept, displayed and treasured is something really special.

5. Express your appreciation face to face with a gratitude visit

While expressing gratitude in person might be a big step for some, the gesture of going out of your way to tell someone how much you appreciate them is enough for everyone to feel the benefits. If you can't make the visit in person, send a personalized video message.

6. Ask how they are (and listen to their response!)

It's easy to feel overwhelmed; the simple act of actively listening to your loved ones can be an effective way to show you value them. Put down your phone, remain attentive and let them steer the conversation.

7 Tips for Setting a Gratitude Challenge

We are all guilty of letting the stresses of daily life get in the way of recognizing and expressing gratitude, we often forget to stop and think about the things we are most grateful for. While the journey to gratefulness may not happen overnight, these tips will help focus your attention on setting your own personal gratitude challenge.

1. The first moments of the day are often when we feel most focused before the tasks of the day take their toll. Try introducing a morning gratitude ritual that allows you to start the day grounded in gratitude. This could be as simple as taking a few moments to focus on the positive, ask yourself, 'what am I grateful for today?'
2. Appreciate the small things; it's not just about the big stuff. Write a list that is unique to you and where you are in your life right now. This can include family, friends, health, your community – even the weather!
3. Develop your own mindfulness session and practice 'being in the moment', focus your attention on the ways that life is good right now rather than thinking too much about the future. The trick is to picture it in your mind and immerse yourself in the feeling of gratitude.
4. Appreciate the good and the bad – while much of the gratitude challenge is about positive experiences, thinking about difficult situations can really help you to appreciate the good.
5. Have a daily recap – spend some time writing down the things you are grateful for before going to bed. Writing down all those thoughts is a good way to keep track of the positives in your life and you can look back on them at any time.
6. Download an app – there are multiple gratitude challenge apps available that help focus your attention, record your appreciation and send friendly reminders to encourage your gratitude development.
7. Use a gratitude challenge calendar – many of these have daily prompts to help focus your mind on all the things you might not even consider.

Thank you again for sticking with us through this conversation about ways to directly express gratitude towards others. I really hope that this has been helpful. I think that there are really 3 main points that I hope you can use in your daily life.

1. Remember that expressing your gratitude towards others will not only improve your mood, but will also give others a boost as well. Spread that sunshine!
2. Expressing gratitude can range from something as specific as a gratitude gift (something specific you make or buy to show appreciation for someone else) or simply offering a smile or kindness to a stranger as you go about your day.
3. Finally, consider challenging yourself (or a friend or colleague) to a gratitude challenge! This will help jumpstart your gratitude practice and build the daily habit of gratitude. Start a morning gratitude ritual, download a gratitude app, or simply make a point to appreciate the “little” things more each day. It will all make a difference.

Thanks so much! I hope this has been helpful.

---Outro---

On behalf of Allina Health and Change to Chill, we thank you for taking the time to listen to our podcast. We do hope you enjoyed this episode and we hope that you join us in other episodes covering even more interesting topics with mental health providers. As always, you can find the show notes and any accompanying research and tools at the change to chill website at www.changetochill.org. In health and wellness, take care and see you next time!