

--- Intro ---

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, and thank you so much for the warm welcome. My name is Jaime Zander, and I am a psychologist with Allina Health who primarily works with children, adolescents, and families. Again, before we even get started, I want to say thank you so much for the important work you all do for our students and the communities you serve. I cannot express enough how grateful I am for such amazing teachers in our Minnesota communities.

In this episode, we are discussing simple ways we can incorporate gratitude in our lives and into the lives of your students. By definition, gratitude is a feeling or emotion of appreciation or thankfulness for something or someone. Gratitude doesn't necessarily mean having a positive mindset or ignoring difficult experiences. Gratitude does not mean that other feelings such as anger, sadness, or even injustice are invalid, however, it is a practice of perspective taking and acknowledging the good in your life. Will a gratitude practice take away negative feelings or alleviate suffering? No, of course not. However, research continues to demonstrate the many benefits of gratitude. Given the circumstances of the past 2 years, most of realize the importance of stress management. There are so many benefits to gratitude, and research has consistently shown gratitude to be an essential component to happy living. Regular gratitude practices can help develop and improve interpersonal relationships, help deal with everyday stressors, in addition to the big upheavals in life. Gratitude can reduce feelings of depression, reduce stress hormone cortisol, and promote feelings of happiness. Dr. Heather Crabtree completed a podcast episode on the many benefits of gratitude and the research that supports gratitude as a practice, and I really encourage you to give it a listen!

So, how can you regularly incorporate gratitude into your daily lives? I'd like to talk about three simple ways you can fit gratitude into a daily practice:

1. Developing a gratitude list
2. Share gratitude with others
3. Develop a gratitude ritual

Gratitude List

Although it sounds simple, the development of a gratitude journal or gratitude list is a classic way many people think about a gratitude practice. It is usually recommended to write down 3-5 things that you are grateful for each day. Remember, this is not usually about the act of writing the list, but more about taking the 3 to 5 minutes of reflection and mindfulness to consider the good things in your life.

Happiness researcher Dr. Laurie Santos at Yale University talks about how doing this practice regularly

for 2 weeks can already create an impact in increasing overall happiness. This doesn't have to be a lengthy meditative practice. I can be as simple as opening up the notes app in your phone and jotting down 3 things that you're thankful for throughout the day. Finally, I like to get real specific about the things we write. So, instead of writing, "I am thankful for my kids" or "I am grateful for my health,"-- write very specific things that brought you joy throughout the day. For example, this might sound like, "I am thankful the sun shining today," or "I am thankful for 8 hours of sleep last night." The intention or the goal is to then start noticing the small, good things as you go about your day.

Sharing gratitude with others

Expression of gratitude will not only impact the person we share it with, but can also bring us happiness and joy by expressing our gratitude for others. There is this wonderful YouTube video called that a colleague shared with our psychology team that I encourage you all to check out called: The Science of Happiness: Gratitude. It demonstrates the emotional impact of reflecting on and sharing one's appreciation for another person. Again, expressing gratitude does not have to be a thoughtful, emotional, long letter to a meaningful person; although it sure can be. Expressing gratitude can be simple remarks throughout the day such as remembering to say thank you to your students for their hard work on a class project, or thank you to a spouse for folding laundry, or thank you to a colleague for restocking supplies. Other examples may include a quick text to a friend saying thank you for supporting me through a tough time or a quick email to a co-worker for covering a shift for you. Expression of gratitude can also look like doing for others as a form of gratitude. This may include offering to cover for a co-worker, bringing a colleague a cup of coffee, or making a small donation to an important cause. The act of expressing gratitude and sharing appreciation can make a large impact on how we feel throughout the day.

Develop a gratitude ritual

As people, we tend to keep our practices when they become ritualized or habitual. The key to developing a longstanding habit is starting small and remaining consistent. Starting small can be as simple as thanking a colleague once a day or sending a text to a friend thanking them for their friendship once per week. Maybe you decide to focus on thanking a spouse or child once a day, even for a small gesture. Maybe you will decide to reflect on 3 things you are grateful for while commuting to work.

Habit stacking is the process of incorporating a new practice into a ritual you already do in your life. For example, reflecting on gratitude when making your morning coffee or sending a thank you text when listening to a weekly podcast. These are things you already do daily or weekly, so it can be helpful to incorporate a gratitude practice into something you are already doing regularly. When we build in habits to daily routine, we start to regularly look for the small joys in our lives.

Hopefully, this provided you with some helpful ways you can incorporate gratitude into your daily life. First, consider regularly developing a mental or written gratitude list. This can help intentionally set a time and practice devoted to gratitude. Next, consider small ways to express gratitude regularly, and finally, consider making gratitude a habit or a ritual by regularly expressing or reflecting on the joys in your life.

Thank you so much for listening and for all you do for your students and communities!

---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!