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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 second podcast in our gratitude series and our focus will be on how to express gratitude in writing. Last time we discussed all the positive benefits of gratitude, as well as the importance of not only recognizing things or people we are grateful for but taking the time to express that gratitude. In this podcast we will discuss how to do that through writing.

Determine the recipient.

There are lots of potential recipients for expressing our gratitude in writing. So it's often helpful to sit down for a few moments, clear your mind, and think about who has impacted you. This could be a career mentor, a supportive family member or a dear friend.

It could be helpful to think of a question, such as "If you could give credit or thanks to one person in your life that you don't give enough credit or thanks to, who would that be?"

It can be helpful to write down anybody who pops into your head. You don't have to write a letter of gratitude to everyone all at once, but it can help to keep a running list so that when you do have time to do this, you can work on that list.

Now that you have a recipient in mind, you can gather your supplies. Decide your letter-writing method and get your supplies, such as stationery or notecards.

Handwritten letters are the gold standard because your handwriting is an extension of you. It's personal and tactile. And don't let messy penmanship be a deterrent: No one is expecting calligraphy. But there's nothing wrong with typed letters; Ms. Davis Kho prefers to type and then print hers. Either way, the point is to create a physical artifact that the person first enjoys as a surprise in the mailbox, and then can keep as a memento.

Think about your recipient.

Once you have decided whom to write to, think about that person and his or her role in your life. You don't need to spend a lot of time, but clear away any distractions and focus on some of your most cherished memories of this person. Think about how you met, what the recipient has done for you at what cost, what the person said that you have never forgotten or ways you have applied his or her advice in your life. Jot down a few bullet points or even a short outline if you would like, but do not overthink or get caught up on planning. A gratitude letter need not encapsulate your entire relationship, or cover everything this person means to you. You can say thanks for just one thing.

Sit down and write.

If it makes you more comfortable, you can start the letter by detailing a reason for reaching out. Ms. Davis Kho started her letters by explaining that it was a milestone birthday year for her, and that she was writing to people who had made a difference in her life. You could say you were inspired by this article. Or, you can keep your letter-writing reasons to yourself and just start with "thank you."

Think back to your brainstorm, and, using evocative details, tell the person why you are grateful. That could be the exact words you remember this person saying, and where you were when they were said. Add how it made you feel — then and now. The recipient might remember the event or favor you are referring to, but the person most likely does not know how it made you feel (Thankful, probably, but also, perhaps, joyful? Safe? Relieved? Inspired?) Don't hold back. It takes a little bravery, but writing sincerely and from the heart turns a polite note into a meaningful memento.

Write in your style.

Don't worry about crafting each sentence just so. You're trying to get to the meaning behind the words. If you can, try to write the way you speak. Imagine the person is on the phone: What would you say?

You might get caught up in selecting exactly what to say. But Mr. Kumar suggested you remember that your recipient will not be scrutinizing your choice of words.

"They are just reading what you have to say, and thinking, 'This is really nice,'" he said. "They aren't thinking, 'Well, how could it have been nicer?'"

Instead of writing a traditional letter, feel free to write a more casual bulleted list. To a career mentor you might say something like: "I've been looking back on the stages of my career and thinking of people who made an impact. You are high up on the list. Here are five times your advice made a difference."

Finish strong.

End with gratitude, and a compliment. What does this favor or event say about the person? Is it indicative of her or his generosity or kindness? Say that explicitly. With the final "thank you," you could perhaps add a wish for the future — to meet at that museum you both love, or to return to the town where you met.

Keep copies.

Just as your recipient might keep the letter, so can you. Snap a picture or scan the letter before sending. Ms. Davis Kho has printed out all of her typewritten letters and bound them into a book. “When I’m feeling low, the book reminds me that I’ve done a good job selecting people,” she said, “and that there are people hidden in plain sight who make our lives better.”

More simple or quick notes of gratitude can be done too! Leave someone a post it note on their desk or in their locker. Send a text message. Write an email. Send a post card. It means more to be really specific. If it’s a person close to you, talk about a memory that means a lot to you. Mention a specific behavior that you appreciated.

- “Thanks for doing what you do!”
- “You are appreciated for all you do. Thank you so much.”
- “The work you do is important and so appreciated.”
- “Sending a little heartfelt appreciation your way today!”
- “Just wanted to express our deep gratitude for the dedicated work you do day after day.”
- “For all you do—and for the kind, thoughtful way you do it—thank you.”
- “We could never take for granted the hard work you do. We see it, and we appreciate you.”
- “Thank you for your friendly, dependable service through every season.”
- “Thank you for going the extra mile for all of us who depend on you. I simply couldn’t be more grateful.”
- “Has anyone told you lately that you’re great at what you do? Well, you are, and it’s appreciated!”
- “It’s easy to see how much you care about the people you serve. I’m grateful to be one of them.”
- “You go above and beyond daily. But here lately, you’ve been going above-er and beyond-er. Thank you!”
- “You’re someone who makes a difference every day. So grateful.”
- “Thank you. Your commitment and professionalism mean more than you know.”
- “When I follow Mr. Rogers’ advice and look for the helpers in this world, I see you and the work you’re doing. Thank you.”
- “Never doubt the difference you make. It’s huge—and so is the gratitude in this little note.”
- “It’s a good feeling knowing there are caring, capable people like you working hard for everyone around you. Thank you for all you do!”

Thanks for sticking with us through this conversation about expressing gratitude through writing. Let’s wrap up with 3 main points today.

1. Expressing gratitude has positive effects for both the sender and receiver and it does not need to take very much time.
2. More lengthy notes can be sent to those that have impacted you the most- they should be handwritten when possible and include details about how they have impacted you, why are you grateful for their presence in your life, and how they made you feel. Don’t worry about wording things perfectly.
3. Short and simple words of gratitude are also beneficial too- a quick text message or post it note will make the day brighter!

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!