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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 ---

My name is Sarah Paper and I'm a Licensed Psychologist with Allina Health. I work primarily with children and adolescents, in addition to a few adult patients. I'm guessing that if you chose to take time out of your day to listen to this podcast, structure is something that may not come naturally to you. Me either! My goal with this podcast is to provide some simple tips to increase meaningful structure to your day.

Sometimes we get to the end of our days and wonder what we even did—what did we accomplish? We can do a great deal, being busy for the entire day, and also feel like we accomplished nothing. As you can imagine, and maybe you've lived it, this repeated experience can take a toll on our mental health. We can have a lot of negative self-talk, self-deprecating beliefs. If you think about it, it can even provide a sense of dread if each day feels like it's meaningless or if we believe we didn't accomplish anything. We might not feel very excited or energized for the next day, which perpetuates the problem.

What makes a day meaningful is going to vary from person to person. So, step one is to think about what you value. You may need to reflect on some of your favorite days, days when you went to sleep knowing you were productive. The word productive might make you cringe. What I mean is a day you felt good about. You can also think about things you wish you would have accomplished at the end of those disappointing days. Hopefully this results in approximately three personal values.

When adding structure, it is important to think about how much structure is truly manageable. We don't want to have our days so structured, that we are setting ourselves up for disappointment or worse, the belief that you failed. I like to keep my structure a bit loose. Start by taking the three or so values and developing a way to implement those into each day.

I started this process when I was in school, getting my doctorate, I was also a new mom. And there were days when I got to the end feeling like I had done nothing, despite being very busy. So I came up with a plan where I would 1) do something in my house to rearrange or clean, 2) do something toward my schoolwork, something else I valued, and 3) the most important one – do something with my young son; so that each day when I got to end, I knew that I did those things that I value and my day was a valuable and meaningful day. Now those things could have been small or they could've been big – it could've been that I quickly vacuumed or picked up a few toys, but I could at least check off that I did something for my house. Or if I even spent a few minutes or so writing on a page for a paper that was due. And I may have gone for a simple walk with my son or gone to pick up a snack to share together. Those little things were grounding points, anchors in my day that let me know I did the things I wanted to do.

I want you to think about how this might look in your workday. I want you to think about the things that are important to you and how you could implement those into your daily practice. It could be that you want to meditate for a few minutes. Maybe it's about building relationships, so having a conversation each day with a new person or even the same person so you're building that relationship – possibly with a student, so each day

you would make sure to have one student that you have a special connection with. These moments are things that you will then reflect on at the end of the day. I like to have, instead of a to-do list, a “done” list. And so at the end of each day before you go to bed, to write down those things that you did based on those three or so categories that you identified as things that you value and give you meaning to your day. Again remembering it's going to be different for each individual.

So I hope this wasn't too simple, I hope it made sense, and I hope that you find ways to add that meaningful structure – your kind of meaningfulness and the amount of structure that you can manage and handle in order to feel successful at the end of the day. You all deserve to feel good about the amazing work that you do.

Thank you for listening to me, and I look forward to talking at you later.

---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](http://www.changetochill.org). In health and wellness, take care and see you next time!