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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.

Today, we are talking about transitions of learning due to covid-19 with Dr. Tonya Freeman, who serves as a primary care psychologist for children, adolescents, adults, and families. She is also a supervisor for our pre and post-doctoral level trainees, and is a lead psychologist for the north region. Please join us in understanding more about transitions of learning due to covid-19 and potential short and long term impacts.

--- Episode ---

Hi everyone! My name is Tonya Freeman, I am an early lifespan primary care psychologist with Allina Health and I want to start by thanking you for listening to our podcast, where we are hopeful to cultivate a space to give back to you. Our teachers who are day in and day out serving our next generations in a time of so much uncertainty. I first want to thank you for showing up today. I value your time and feel honored you have chosen to spend a few minutes with me, for you, your students, your family, and your community as without filling your cup, it is significantly more difficult to serve others, even if serving others fills your cup. There are certainly components that drain our cups completely dry, even when we love our jobs, especially in times of so much change and uncertainty. As I honor your time, I will dive right into this episode topic of "transitions of learning due to Covid and the impacts"

Topic one: Covid and Collective Trauma

In the last two plus years, our society as a whole has experienced many changes, losses, transitions, unpredictability, and death. There will continue to be ongoing research and studies to the long term impact of Covid-19 on mental health, wellbeing, economic impact, and societal functioning as a whole. A term many research articles are referencing in looking at these outcomes is collective trauma. Collective trauma is a shared emotional reaction to a terrible event. As a result of these experiences, people often feel powerless, hopeless, and alone (despite being a shared trauma). Well known collective traumas include historical events of the Holocaust, American Slavery, the Attack on Pearl Harbor, September 11th, and now Covid-19 pandemic.

Many of you might be ready to shut off this episode and skip to the next as we commonly hear “I am so over Covid, I just want it to be done.” Which is a common response to a triggering or perceived stressor. While I too would like Covid-19 to be completely done, we know there are immediate and long-term impacts that will continue to unfold over the next several years and decade and it is important we take an active stance to put into place resources and understanding as opposed to avoidance. So please, I invite you to stick with me as we dive into potential impacts of covid-19 in the classroom that you have noticed and may continue to notice so that we can all support, guide, and lift up during these times of recovery.

Topic 2- Disparities in education in response to Covid-19

You likely don't need me, a psychologist, to tell you just how heavy our school communities were hit with the openings and closures of schools throughout 2020-2021 and part of 2022. Yet, I find it important to highlight a few key points here regarding educational disparities increased as a result of covid-19 changes.

An article titled “US states and districts have the opportunity to not only help students catch up on unfinished learning from the pandemic but also tackle long-standing historical inequities in education” in McKinsey & Company highlights the impact of the pandemic on k-12 student learning. Analyses revealed that on average, a student was behind in mathematics by five months and reading by four months. Given parents losing jobs, economic hardships for families, and reliance on access to technology and the ability to sit down, listen, visualize, and participate in virtual formats, pre-existing achievement gaps were increased and impacted historically disadvantaged youth and family to a greater degree. Districts were faced with the challenge of keeping staff and students safe while also juggling providing an effective and accessible learning environment.

Topic 3- Behavioral and psychological effects of covid-19

As a whole, we have seen substance use, trauma, and overall mental health disorders increase across a wide span of populations, not just for children and adolescents but also their parents. This is concerning on a multitude of levels. If one person in a system is experiencing hardships, the system is typically able to adapt based on adequate resources. However, if all parties within the system are experiencing dysregulation, such as with collective trauma, the resources quickly become inadequate in proportion to the stressor. Meaning we see more dysfunction. We are seeing truancy rates increase as well as depression, anxiety, aggression, acting out, sexual promiscuity, and substance use disorders. This becomes increasingly concerning when we consider the greater difficulty with access to resources for mental health with the increased number of emergency department visits for youth and adults since covid-19 for mental health alone. The CDC indicates that from March-October 2020, the proportion of mental

health-related visits increased by 24% among U.S. children aged 5-11 years and 31% among adolescents aged 12-17 years compared to 2019. These numbers are alarming to say the least.

Topic 4- so how does this all relate to the classroom?

In considering the increased need for educational and mental health resources in a time with decreased access to resources, it is time for us to say, how can we make changes right now, where we are, to support one another. This podcast for example highlights how a school district recognized increased emotional and behavioral difficulties within the school system, the impact on teachers, and a need for support from resources. Together, Allina and the school identified ways to partner to increase support for all, rather than one at a time or resource dependent. I highlight this because you, as teachers and support staff are part of this collective trauma yet as caring professionals you are also asked to also provide in times of distress and coming together as a collective unit to support and respond will help us all find hope and meaning in a time of hardships.

You may have noticed the following symptoms from youth, young adults, and adults across the lifespan in the last two plus years:

- feeling sad or not enjoying previously enjoyed activities
- frequent crying
- worrying, feeling anxious, nervous, jittery, or stressed out
- difficulties sleeping
- lack of appetite
- difficulties concentrating
- feeling overwhelmed
- difficulty completing daily activities
- decreased academic capacity
- social withdrawal
- hyperactivity
- impulsivity
- irritability
- decreased frustration tolerance
- and the list goes on

These are all examples but not all inclusive to responses to adjustment and trauma that we may see on various levels of impairment.

Topic 5- so what do we do

Throughout this podcast you will hear many episodes on self-care, relaxation strategies, time management, and creating a trauma informed classroom. These are all wonderful ways to improve adequate resources for responding to stressors. And the thing I want to highlight the most is connection. Connection with self, others, and finding meaning in this mess. While we have all certainly experienced some sort of hardship in the last two plus years, we have also likely all experienced positive, meaningful, and impactful moments too. Those are the moments we strive to manifest. It is amazing what happens when we see a glimmer of hope, whether that is a win for a student, a family, you personally, or for someone around you. It is also amazing what can happen when we slow down, acknowledge that we have all been in a collective traumatic historical event, and we are all in this together. While we have an uphill battle of educational gaps to close and mental health to respond to, we will get there much faster together than alone.

While we certainly could have jumped more deeply into the rabbit hole of the impacts of covid-19, I am hopeful you found this episode helpful and can walk away with ideas for how you can make meaning, connect with others, and continue to serve as an important part to the whole.

Thank you for all that you do for our students and community at large. I cherish your work and I cherish your time. See you in a future episode, Dr. Freeman.

---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!