

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 listening and tuning in. I want to first start off by saying thank you for your time and the care you show yourselves, your students, and your communities. As educators, you are so vital to the wellbeing of the students you serve, and I so appreciate your hard work and dedication.

In this episode, I am going to discuss several skills that can hopefully contribute to overall effective communication. I like talking about this topic, because it can be widely applied to so many different situations. Communicating effectively will improve all kinds of relationships, including professional relationships, romantic relationships, parent-child relationships, family relationships, and friendships. Being an effective communicator is not a one size fits all, but often requires a diverse set of skills that include both verbal and non-verbal skills. Although not an exhaustive list of best communication practices, I am hoping to provide some useful tools that can aid in effective communication across a variety of relationships in your lives.

So why is adapting our communication so important? I think we have all been in situations in which we think we are being very clear about something and come to find out later that what we said was definitely misinterpreted. The thing about communication is that there can often be a discrepancy between what is said and what is actually heard. There is good news. Communication is a skill that can be improved through intention and practice. Overall, by improving communication skills, we can reduce frustration, confusion, and improve understanding in relationships.

In this episode, I am going to talk about 4 different skills to consider in aiding in effective communication among individuals.

The first being, Emotional regulation.

One of the most essential components to effective communication is emotion regulation. Our communication is largely impacted by our emotional state, meaning that the content of what we say, how it is said, and our nonverbal cues depend on how regulated we are in the moment.

Therefore, it is so vital to be attuned to your own emotional reactions and internal state for effective communication to occur. We each come to the table with our own experiences and viewpoints that impact how we see the situation, and it is very possible that the person you are talking to has a completely different worldview, and therefore, can react differently than we may react.

If you find yourself having strong feelings in conversation, couple things to consider to keep yourself emotionally regulated while engaging in communication:

- Ask yourself, what am I feeling right now?
- It is always ok to pause, engage in some deep breathing
- Take a break: it is always ok to say, “I am going to need to think about this further before we discuss this.” or “Let me think on that, and I will get back to you.”

Taking a break can allow us to regulate and fully reflect and be intentional with our communication.

The second skill I want to discuss is being mindful of our nonverbal communication skills.

The act of expressing communication without the use of words is considered non-verbal communication and typically occurs through body language, tone, facial expressions, and body orientation. Nonverbal communication should ultimately reinforce what you are saying, not contradict it. If you say one thing, but your body language says something else, the recipient may be confused, frustrated, or misinterpret things all together. In considering non-verbal communication skills with students or children, it is important to be aware of body orientation and presence:

- Physically, this looks like orienting yourself to the individual with whom you are talking
- If they are a small child, getting on their level, and maintaining eye contact. Showing them you are fully attuned to what’s going on with them.
- Be mindful of tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions, making sure they match what you are trying to communicate.

The third skill I am going to discuss is that of active listening.

There’s a big difference between engaged listening and simply hearing what is being said. When one is actually engaged with what’s being said, you are able to hear subtle nuances and changes in intonation that indicate how the person is feeling and emotions they are trying to communicate. As defined by the American Psychological Association, Active listening is a way to be engaged in communication through listening and asking questions as a way of fully understanding the depth and emotion of what someone is saying. The import thing here is the intention behind the conversation—active listening to someone is for the sole purpose of understanding. When engaging in active listening, a few thing to consider:

- Listen without judgement or taking a stance or opinion on what is being said
- Allow the person to finish speaking without interruption
- Monitor non-verbal communication, including eye contact and body posture
- Nod along or express verbally that you are listening
- Ask genuine questions in order to gain full understanding or clarification

Lastly, and I want to comment on reflection.

Effective communication can often be accomplished through the use of reflection statements. A reflection statement signals to the person that you are actively listening and understanding what they are trying to communicate. A reflection statement is essentially a sentence that reiterates what the person is saying. Use the speaker’s exact words if necessary or provide a short summary of what you heard in order to communicate understanding. This can sound like, “I heard you say that...” or “ It

sounds like..." It is important to allow the person to either affirm that what you are hearing is true or provide corrective feedback if needed.

I hope you found these skills useful in further learning more about effective communication. I invite you to try out a few of the following tools over the next few weeks:

- Remember to monitor your own emotions and engage actively in regulating your emotions if needed in conversation
- Monitor non-verbal communication
- Engage in active listening skills. Nod along, ask questions, be fully present.
- And use reflection statements to communicate understanding

Thank you all so much for your time and all you do!

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!