



Top Tips for Supporting a Remote Workforce



Working in a different way

As we are hearing daily that we are 'living in unprecedented times', many people are now working from home and many businesses are facing tougher times than they have ever known. Whether you're used to working in an office, directly with the public in service roles, outdoors or moving around the country, the normal way of working has changed dramatically.

Staying healthy while managing our individual situations is now a top priority for all of us. However, looking after our health and wellbeing is not always easy when we are juggling our workloads, our businesses, caring for our families and supporting our communities.

Rest assured, there are things you can do to manage this transition, now is the time to focus on the things we can control, as individuals and as businesses. We have put this factsheet together to provide you with top tips to keep your workforce healthy and connected when working from home, with vital information about some of the key support services available locally and links to what has recently been published.

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1 Top tips for communication & information sharing across your organisation

- **Company updates** from senior team members are so important at this time and can significantly help reduce stress and anxiety in your workforce. Managers and Senior leaders can use company updates to reassure employees with honest and up to date information to bring your workforce with you through the challenges we are all facing. Video updates are a great way to provide a more personal approach, so utilise technology to bring the office into the home. Leaders and managers can demonstrate technology that can support and aid employees to keep in touch and manage their client facing work using apps such as [Microsoft Teams](#), [Zoom](#) and [Skype](#).

- **Open a 2-way conversation and talk to your team and your colleagues regularly.** Share your ideas and plans, ask for input from others and listen to their ideas. You can invite teams to submit their own tips for remote working and to share what has worked for them with colleagues via email.

- **Setting up virtual drop ins**, a team huddle or a dial in for a virtual coffee break can really help to keep lines of communication open between teams and departments and to combat social isolation. We may not be present in the workplace, but we can still connect in the same head space thanks to technology such as phones, email, instant messaging portals and video.

2 Top tips for employees on setting up your workstation at home

• **Making a comfortable space to work from is so important.** Make the most of your home workspace and adapt your desk table and space. Think about lighting, the position of your computer and the position of your chair. Small changes can make a big difference, try to declutter your space and have some props around you that can help you focus.

• **We may need to improvise with what we have at home,** many employees will not have a home office or access to some of the equipment that was available in the workplace. However we can make sure that we all follow a basic display screen equipment assessment.

• Provide employees with a Display Screen

Equipment (DSE) checklist and encourage them to use it at home. There are many examples out there online or if you have one for your company you can remind all staff to use it at home. Here are a couple of examples:

- o The Health and Safety Executive have a free checklist on their website to help set up DSE at home <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ck1.pdf>. There is also advice for employers and managers here about how you can support employees with this <https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm>
- o The Back Care Charity also offer guidance on setting up your workstation on their [website here](#). Keep talking about breaks with colleagues and employees and keep the conversation going on how they are working and how they are feeling.

3 Top tips for time management & establishing a realistic schedule

• **Maintain a routine and try and stick to a similar routine as normal.** Simple things such as setting the alarm as usual, getting dressed as you would normally help to normalise a routine. It is important to have focussed time to work without being controlled by your computer to ensure your routine is as varied as possible.

• **Switch from home to work mode by having something you physically do to 'flip the switch'.** It could be a walk round the block [updated government advice says people are allowed to walk or run with members of their own household and in groups of no more than two people], making a special kind of tea, or lighting a candle at your desk. It doesn't matter what it is but do it without fail to create a strong association in your mind.

• **Break down your days into chunks of time for example try 45-60 minute chunks of focused work.** If you have children at home with you this could be a good way to balance your work with a schedule of activities for them. It helps to plan how you will use each chunk of time, set different tasks and activities and goals. This is also a good way to make sure you take regular breaks. Negotiate your schedule with others in the home if you can, this will help ease the pressure on all parties and can really make a difference to mental wellbeing and stress reduction.

• **Take your breaks.** It can be difficult to tear yourself away from your laptop but that doesn't mean you shouldn't take breaks. Leave your desk for lunch and take advantage of being at home to walk the dog and blow the cobwebs away for half an hour in the afternoon. You'll return feeling refreshed and more productive for the rest of the day. This also includes making sure you make time to make proper meals and drink water regularly, rather than snacking continuously throughout the day and then crashing in a sugar slump at 3pm.

4 Top tips for looking after your physical health

Exercise - There are so many fitness instructors out there at the moment producing free workouts for both adults and children that you can do at home. If you already undertake regular exercise then make sure you keep it up. Many clubs and classes and gyms are going online and there are so many things that you can use in the home to simulate the gym equipment you might be used to.

Sport England have launched #stayinworkout campaign https://www.sportengland.org/stayinworkout#get_active_at_home

There are loads suggestions for free activities and workouts that you can do at home to suit a range of different tastes alongside clear information on the latest government guidance for us all to keep safe and protect the NHS at this time.

Get Help to Stop Smoking - for smokers worrying about their health and the increased risks smokers have of becoming seriously ill with Covid 19, help is available. [Healthy Lifestyles Coventry at www.hlscoventry.org](http://www.hlscoventry.org) is here to make sure that no-one is struggling with this alone. One-to-one support and coaching for smokers is still available, thanks to technology this can all happen without the need for face to face contact at this time so why not encourage everyone to get help and Quit for Covid! You can contact us via the website above or call **0800 122 3780** to talk to someone who can help.

We Can Move from Active Gloucestershire

We can move is a social movement to get you, me and everybody in Gloucestershire active. It is a whole system approach, addressing all aspects of daily life to create an environment in which everyone can be physically active. Have a look at their latest newsletter and a range of resources offering up to date advice and information on how to stay active during the coronavirus restrictions and the benefits of physical activity for us all at this time.

<https://wecanmove.net/resources>



5 Top tips for mindfulness & wellbeing

5 Ways to Wellbeing



GIVE

- yourself a break - you will need to work differently during this challenging time
- your time to help a colleague, neighbour or friend
- your expertise - don't be afraid to challenge decisions

BE ACTIVE

- Get into some good habits whilst your working from home. No-one can see you so they can't laugh
- short episodes of stretching and moving even for 3 minutes get the body and brain energised

TAKE NOTICE

- of all the advice and guidance on staying safe
- be aware of which of your colleagues are keeping in touch and others
- of what and when you're eating and drinking
- of what your sleep pattern is like
- of the things that make you feel well (e.g. a walk in your garden / outdoors - following safe distance recommendations)

CONNECT

- with your colleagues and team
- with someone you don't usually work with
- with your local community or volunteer network

LEARN

- stay with facts and evidence base
- improve your existing knowledge through online learning or topic specific research
- new healthier behaviours

The NHS Every Mind Matters webpages have been updated with a free action plan and top tips to help us all look after our mental health and wellbeing while staying at home <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters>.

Mind

The charity Mind has also catalogued a number of useful resources for businesses and organisations on supporting yourself and your colleagues with their mental health when self-isolating and working from home.

<https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/toolkit/coronavirus-and-isolation-supporting-yourself-and-your-colleagues/>

6 Top tips for maintaining a supportive and healthy workplace culture

Maintain and reinforce the workplace culture to keep staff engaged and encourage healthy habits for wellbeing with the following ideas.

- o Develop a forum for team members to chat casually (such as a Whatsapp group) to help bring employees together
- o Maintain company culture by considering rewards for accomplishments (such as gift cards)
- o Tell your teams and colleagues not to be afraid to talk if they are struggling with any issues during this time; ensure they know that colleagues and managers are here to help, and have to know where help is most needed in order to provide support.
- o Raise awareness of support networks to help those suffering from self-isolation, anxious about their health and well being and managing stress.

- o Accepting change is never easy, show your teams that we are in this together and we are all experiencing similar emotions, fears and concerns. We know that in a very short space of time things have changed very quickly. Yet we are more resilient than we recognise, and we will get through this by sticking together so that when we emerge on the other side, we are stronger than before.
- o Build opportunities for socialising into your day by trying to call colleagues rather than always email.
- o If you really struggle to apply yourself when you're on your own, try virtual 'body doubling' - connect with a colleague via a Skype video call but both work 'live' on your own project rather than chatting.

7 The best sources of up to date information

Make sure your teams have access to the most up to date information and know what is out there to help them and how they can find it.

Keep yourselves connected and help your staff and colleagues to take advantage of the resources, support coaching and encouragement that can help them get through this.

There is so much support out there if we know where to look for it but there is also a lot of mis-information going around that can confuse and upset people.

Have a look at our checklist here for some key reliable sources of help and support.

1. List of NHS Recommended Helplines for mental wellbeing and mental health support
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines/>

2. For credible accurate news sources with up to date facts about Covid 19
Use [GOV.UK Corona Virus](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus), or the [NHS Website Corona Virus Information](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus/), to fact check information that you get from newsfeeds, social media or from other people.

3. Support for those suffering domestic abuse

- o Freephone 24 hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0808 2000 247 (run by Refuge)
- o <https://chat.womensaid.org.uk/> (open Monday-Friday 10am-12pm)
- o <https://mensadvice.org.uk/> 0808 801 0327
- o <https://respectphoneline.org.uk/> 0808 802 4040 (for anyone worried that they may be harming someone else)
- o <http://www.galop.org.uk/> 0800 999 5428 (national helpline for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people experiencing domestic abuse)

4. Up to date Government guidance on social distancing
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults#background-and-scope-of-guidance>

5. Support with Financial concerns
Guidance for employees on rights at work, benefit entitlements and further information, signpost to the Gov.uk [guidance for employees, citizens advice](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/employees-citizens-advice) or the [National Debt line](https://www.gov.uk/national-debt-line).

Resources for Health and Wellbeing

Healthy Lifestyles Coventry

Coventry's Healthy Lifestyles Service are still operating across the county to offer vital 1-1 support for individuals who are worried about the impact that smoking or excess weight may have on their health at this time. Smokers are at an increased risk of becoming seriously ill with the coronavirus so help is at hand from their dedicated team to help individuals quit for covid 19 and improve their health. Referrals can be made online via <https://hlsc Coventry.org>

Being your best

AT HOME WORKING

By now you will have got the basics down for home working, like getting dressed in the usual work type gear, creating a good space that you can leave, creating a rhythm and structure for your day, taking breaks. All good things, yet as the days turn into weeks, how do we maximise our resilience, creativity and wellbeing?

Stay Connected

Encourage encounters where you and your team may reach out to others you don't work with typically but may see regularly – this helps combat loneliness and creates connection.

Team Working

Remember you are still a team – just not physically together. Use technology to keep connected – phone, video, online and have a session agreeing how you each 'work at your best' as members of the team and respect people's needs to enable the job to get done, When we are at our best working remote it's like what?

Leading each other

You have to work hard at maintaining trust and confidence for personal autonomy, helping each other to make decisions and crack on. We all need to feel certainty and in control of our time and productivity. Make it easy for each other to do the right thing.

Capture Innovation

Recognise that everyone has made massive adjustments in thinking, beliefs, behaviours and ways of working in the past few days and weeks and these innovations have 'just happened'. Collaboration has increased 'because we have no choice'. Find ways to capture what's really working with these changes and help to embed in the 'new normal' (try drawing it or recording it on video) so you can be even more effective and productive. Remember we all feed off each others energy.

Be Kind

Keep compassion and kindness at the front and centre...a lot of people are new to remote working and this radical change in the way we work will take time to adjust. We will have great days and challenging days and all in different times. Be Kind to yourself and others. Remember each time we are compassionate and kind it helps your brain make the happy chemicals like dopamine and oxytocin.

Stay at home, protect our #NHS & Save Lives

9 Local Community Support

NHS Volunteer Responders

NHS Volunteer Responders is a new group that will carry out simple, non-medical tasks to support people in England who have been asked to shield themselves from coronavirus because of underlying health conditions.

NHS Volunteer Responders to do simple but vital tasks including driving people to and from hospital and delivering food and medication. transporting equipment and supplies and making regular phone calls to check on people isolating at home.

The scheme has been temporarily suspended to process current offers of support but may reopen soon. Information can be found here <https://www.england.nhs.uk/participation/get-involved/volunteering/nhs-volunteer-responders/>

If you are clinically trained, please visit: www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/returning-clinicians/





www.hlscoventry.org
0800 122 3780