

Understanding working from home

From time to time, organisations may ask their employees to work from home. This is an effective way to ensure employees can continue to contribute in a positive and meaningful way and protect their income. It also ensures the employer can continue to meet the needs of those they service.

On the plus side, there are a number of benefits for employees in working from home. It can however, also present a few challenges and the lack of regular connection and feelings of isolation in particular can be difficult. For leaders who are used to having all of their team in the same environment, it can be daunting to know the best way to engage, direct and support their team.

What are the key things I should focus on?

- ◆ **Agree expectations** – talk with your leader about what is expected of you while working from home and how you will be managed
- ◆ **Take regular breaks** – in a different environment it can be easy to forget to stop working. Ensure you schedule regular breaks from your work
- ◆ **Evaluate how it is working** – check in with your team leader regularly, be open to feedback and be prepared to change how you are working
- ◆ **Establish a routine** – even though your environment is different, establishing a good routine will help you to stay focused
- ◆ **Communicate regularly** – staying connected with your colleagues is critical. It is important to communicate more than you think you need
- ◆ **Embrace the positives** – remember that working from home provides benefits such as avoiding commute times and costs

How do I set up a productive workspace?

Your work environment plays an important part in helping you be productive and successful.

- ◆ Designate a dedicated workspace and establish boundaries, such as working hours and when you will be available. This will assist you to separate your work activities from your home life.
- ◆ If other family members (i.e. partner and/or children) are also at home, discuss with them expectations around what times you will be unavailable due to work events.
- ◆ If possible, set up your workstation near a source of natural light. Exposure to sunlight can increase the serotonin in the brain, boosting your mood and helping you to feel calmer and more focused.
- ◆ Reduce the clutter on and around your desk space. The process of decluttering can help you to feel more relaxed and less stressed.
- ◆ Identify any potential distractors you may have at home and put strategies in place to minimise them

Is it important to take breaks?

It can be easy when you are working from home to sit at your desk or computer for long periods without a break. This is not beneficial for your health or your productivity.

- ◆ Take a proper lunch break – spend time away from your work area and try to get a little exercise or activity that is different from your work
- ◆ Take a short break mid-morning and mid-afternoon. It is important to let your brain relax a little so you can return to work feeling more focused and invigorated.
- ◆ Utilise outdoor spaces, such as your garden or balcony if you have them. Even 15 minutes in nature and fresh air can improve your mental health.

How do I avoid feeling isolated or lonely at home?

For some people, working from home can feel isolating, or even lonely. Just because you are not physically with others, however, doesn't mean that you are disconnected and cut off from your friends, colleagues and clients. Technology enables us to use our virtual network in a positive way.

- ◆ Use instant messaging apps, such as WhatsApp or Slack and video platforms such as Skype, Zoom, Teams, or FaceTime to regularly chat to your colleagues and clients and to hold virtual team meetings. Using your camera so you can see your colleagues is particularly helpful!
- ◆ Make sure you don't just ask about work – in the same way you ask how people are when you are together you should do the same remotely. Using video, sharing photos or just checking in with others are all great ways to maintain a healthy connection.
- ◆ Keep your leaders and colleagues informed of your work progress and any work issues you are experiencing. Make sure you are accessible in case people have questions for you.
- ◆ If you are working from home but your colleagues are at work, you may want to dial in to not just team meetings, but also social events or presentations. For organisers, it is important to invite all of the team to attend, even if they are working from home, so that they feel included.

Working from home can deliver many benefits, but it does require planning, structure and management to ensure it works for everyone.

We're just a phone call away if you need coaching around how to improve your working from home experience or if you are a leader wanting guidance on how to best support your team.