

Mentally HEALTHY WORKPLACES



Government
of South Australia

Supporting employees' mental health while working from home

- ▶ Working from home or being isolated at home for long periods can impact on individual's mental health. Maintaining the social networks and structure that work provides can support people during times of isolation and disruption from their normal routine.

Managers have a responsibility to check on the welfare of their employees (as well as work being performed) whilst working from home or on directed leave. Below are some tips for how managers can effectively and supportively check on their employees remotely.

Principles to Guide Your Approach

Ensure regular phone or video call check-ins are scheduled e.g. once or twice per week.

Allocate a mutually convenient time for the call so that your employee knows when to expect your call, and let them know that you can be contacted at other times.

It's important to allow the person to talk and small talk is encouraged. This will help build rapport and will help combat loneliness.

Use open-ended questions as much as possible to keep them talking (questions that can't be answered with a yes or a no).

Use encouragers to keep the conversation going e.g.

“Go on...

Tell me more

Can you give me an example?

Making the phone call

Prior to making the call, consider what you'd like to cover and how you will structure the call.

Start by explaining why you are calling e.g.

“Hi (name of employee), I'm ringing to check that everything is ok for you working from home.

There are key areas that each manager should aim to cover during the phone call. These suggested questions, conversation starters and tips on topics to cover are a starting point.

Topics that could be covered:

Work

Discuss short and long term goals (as applicable).

“Tell me about the work you are doing at the moment?

Are there any barriers to you completing this work at home?

How is the technology and resources provided to work from home working for you?

Do you have too much/too little to do?

What can I do to support you while you are working at home?

Offer any support to coach or assist with problems they may be experiencing and acknowledge the difficulties that exist. Acknowledge work that has been performed and provide positive feedback.

Routine

It's important to encourage employees to develop a routine at home.

“How are you structuring your day?

If it will help, encourage employees to make a list of actions for each day as well as longer term goals.

Encourage employees to break their day into blocks of time, for example, 30-60 minutes.

Encourage employees to take breaks to step away from devices to stretch, go outside, in addition to a lunch break.

Health

“How is your physical health at the moment?

If the employee is unwell, encourage appropriate support seeking from health care professionals and/or advise to cease work to recover from illness. Be aware of other illness and disabilities that are not related to COVID 19 but may impact on the person's ability to work, including mental illness.

“How is the rest of your family?

It is important to ask employees about family members around them, including elderly relatives, as this may be a source of stress.

“What are you doing to keep physically active?

Encourage daily physical activity and getting outside if possible.

Emotional/Social

It is important to recognise that employees may have other issues on their mind (illness, job loss of a partner and financial pressures) and that this may impact on their ability to concentrate at work.

“How are you emotionally?

Are you feeling worried or sad?

Acknowledge that it is normal to feel worried, overwhelmed or have difficulty concentrating during difficult situations.

“Do you have someone to talk to?

Is this helping?

How are the rest of your family?

If an employee reports they are feeling distressed provide both the business name and number of the agency's EAP. Provide alternative contact points as well including:

SA COVID-19 Mental Health Support Line

1800 632 753 provides mental health support for people surrounding COVID-19

Lifeline 13 11 14

Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636

[Beyond Blue Information and online forum](#)

Ensure you follow up with the employee in the next phone call to offer further support if needed and to see if they have had any barriers to seeking help.

Technology and WHS considerations

“ Are you having any difficulties using the technology?

How are you finding using (MS Teams/Skype/VPN etc.)?

Do you feel you have adequate equipment and a workplace set up for you to work safely at home?
How can I help with this?

What if the employee doesn't raise any issues?

If the employee has not raised any issues make sure you ask:

“ Do you have any concerns that we haven't talked about?

Then, reiterate that you are available to talk outside these phone calls.

Ending the meeting

Provide a brief summary of the actions you expect the employee to take before you speak again and the actions you are committing to.

Looking after yourself

Being a manager during a period of uncertainty can be challenging and it's important to look after yourself as well. Make sure you have a regular time to catch up with your own manager and if you think you are struggling then speak up. All SA Public Sector agencies have Employee Assistance Programs and you can make a phone appointment to discuss your own concerns or to seek support on how to manage your team remotely.

Stay safe. Stay well. Stay connected. Look after each other. We will get through this.

Mentally HEALTHY WORKPLACES FRAMEWORK

To create mentally healthy workplaces that support employees through their public sector career.

