

## RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

### Mental Health & Wellbeing of staff working from home

Staff and managers need to be aware that home workers are lone workers and should be treated as such, particularly when it comes to mental health and wellbeing. Many workers will be undertaking home working for the first time, to speak nothing of the potential requirements for isolation due to Covid-19. Some employees may already have experience of a day or so a week working from home, however few of them will have worked full time from home and managers will have managed large teams in such a situation. It should also be noted that some employees are also self-isolating for a further 12 weeks under government guidelines and that additional support will be needed.

There is a lot of misinformation swirling around - stay informed by looking at trusted sources of information such as government and NHS websites.

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/> <https://www.gov.scot/>

Maintaining communication networks while working remotely is imperative for the management of work tasks during this time, but also that interpersonal interaction and sense of community is also important.

Managers need to think about how they can maintain levels of social support while their workforce is home-based by using collaboration technologies perhaps, enterprise social media, regular online meetings or even the occasional phone call. Line managers should be encouraged to ensure employees continue to receive the same level of support as working from home may not necessarily improve work-life balance. In fact, a failure to properly segment work and family or home life can increase feelings of work-life conflict and to reduced work satisfaction. Employees working from home need to feel they can still switch off at the end of the day and take breaks – this can be more difficult when the lines between home and work become blurred. This might be complicated further if other family are also at home, which is likely in the upcoming few weeks. Those who have tried to work at home with young children – or indeed with any caring responsibility – will appreciate how stressful this can be in the workplace.

#### **Connect**

To connect with work, you need a suitable workspace and I.T. Identify a corner at home to work and keep your work equipment. This will lend itself to a feeling of “going to work”. A sensible worktop and screen arrangement are essential. Employees should undertake the Display Screen Equipment awareness course on iLearn for at home as they should have for their business workstation.

Physical isolation and or shielding doesn't mean social media distancing. Keep in touch with colleagues regularly, text, direct message, make every effort to attend online meetings, or check out Twitter for a flurry of fun.

Appropriate breaks are a must – think of all those biscuits just for you (and your co-habitees!) or have a healthy snack. Get your whole team involved – announce a

given time and use the discussion function to chat. If bandwidth allows Skype works, with the added value of motivating you to keep an orderly workspace!

Keep to a routine so colleagues know when you are available and obviously to avoid going completely feral.

### **Be active**

Follow the Government guidelines regarding safe activities. Leave the house every day and get some fresh air – the garden counts. This will also encourage you to get dressed (it really does help).

Have regular breaks, get up and move. It's too easy to get lost in your screen. Maybe set a reminder to move every 20 minutes, find a buddy and prompt each other to shift. Arrange an online break or commit to sending each other photographic evidence of your movement. Hanging out the washing counts.

### **Emotional Wellbeing**

Take notice of your mood, and that of colleagues. If you're feeling dazed reach out – start a discussion on your messenger, skype or teams check out Twitter; open the window or go outdoors and breathe deeply and enjoy the fresh air.

If you notice a colleague struggling (look out for lack of engagement, confused flurries of email or just terse texts) connect with them and encourage them to do the same, or just ask them what they had for breakfast. The mundane will become a gentle way to connect. Whatever it takes, the moment spent doing this is worth a whole morning of work.

You must take notice of your loved ones, too, and when working at home you can do this. Though do note you can't meaningfully attend to family needs while emailing. Do one thing at a time. In most instances work will wait, a cuddle for your loved one will make them, and you, feel much better than doing both things half-baked. Putting family first enables you to put your full energies into work when you are at your desk/dining table.

You'll be surprised what a difference losing a commute makes. Establish a "preparing for work" routine, be that a quick tidy or washing the pots. Contemplating work while doing this is your psychic commute – which may be more productive than a physical one.

Spend a few minutes settling into your workspace, prioritising your to do list and preparing to be at work. In the same way, practice a shut-down at the end of the day, write a to do list for tomorrow and reflect on the day's achievements and tidy your desk. This will help you switch off.

Make a point of appreciating positive feedback from colleagues when connecting, enjoy the daffodils outside when you get up from your desk, the birdsong that has returned to now quiet cities. Share these pleasures with your team. You'll be surprised how connected to each other you'll feel when sharing these small moments of pleasure.

Look after your mental health and wellbeing if you are staying home by following the hints and tips in our [Staff Wellbeing Guide](#).

The following guidance should be followed to help give some structure and routine to your day:

### **1. Plan your day**

We are all adjusting to a new, rather strange, way of life. This can be a risk to our mental wellbeing.

As tempting as it might be to stay in pyjamas all day, regular routines are essential for our identity, self-confidence and purpose.

Try to start your day at roughly the same time you usually would and aim to set aside time each day for movement, relaxation, connection and reflection.

### **2. Move more every day**

Being active reduces stress, increases energy levels, can make us more alert and help us sleep better.

Explore different ways of adding physical movement and activity to your day and find some that work best for you.

Even at home, there will be lots of ways to exercise and keep your body moving.

Read this guide on [keeping active](#) and visit [Every Mind Matters](#) for some ideas to get you started.

### **3. Try a relaxation technique**

Relaxing and focusing on the present can help improve your mental health and lighten negative feelings.

Try some different meditation or breathing exercises to see what helps. For example, sometimes we can be so tense that we do not even remember what being relaxed feels like. Progressive muscle relaxation teaches you to recognise when you are starting to get tense and how to relax.

A range of [relaxation techniques, including progressive muscle relaxation](#) are available from the NHS

### **4. Connect with others**

Staying at home, especially if you live on your own, can feel lonely. Find creative ways to keep in touch with co-workers, friends, family, and others to help you (and them) feel more connected and supported.

Explore ways of connecting that work for you, whether that's by post, over the phone, social media, or video-chat. This could be anything, from sharing a cup of tea over video, playing an online game together, or simply sending a supportive text-message.

### **5. Take time to reflect and practice self-compassion**

Make time every day to reflect on what went well. It's important to recognise your successes and the things you are grateful for, no matter how small. Consider keeping a gratitude journal each day where you could write two or three of these things every night before you go to bed.

Mindfulness techniques may also help you focus on the present rather than dwelling on unhelpful thoughts (though they may not be helpful for those experiencing more severe depression).

There are a number of [relaxation and other digital exercises](#) on this website.

## **6. Improve your sleep**

Feelings of uncertainty and changes to daily life may mean you have more difficulty sleeping.

There is a lot you can do to improve your sleep. Aim to go to bed and get up at the same time each day, even at the weekend if you can, and try to get some natural sunlight (by opening your curtains and windows) where possible. This helps to regulate your body clock which can help you sleep better.

Wind down before bed by avoiding using your phone, tablet, computer or TV for an hour before bedtime.

A range of [tips for improving sleep](#) can be found here and from [Every Mind Matters#](#)

## **7. Relax**

Paying more attention to the present moment can improve your mental wellbeing. This includes your thoughts and feelings, your body and the world around you.

Some people call this awareness "mindfulness". Mindfulness can help you enjoy life more and understand yourself better. It can positively change the way you feel about life and how you approach challenges.

Read more about [mindfulness](#), including steps you can take to be more mindful in your everyday life.