

WORK AT HOME AND STAYING CONNECTED

This tip sheet has been prepared to help you understand how this can impact your mental health, and also how to mitigate feeling disconnected and alone.

Unfortunately the more we work apart, the more it can impact productivity and our sense of community and connection with others.

The risk is that employees working remotely may experience lower engagement with the workplace. People can feel anxious, and worried that their work will be questioned, or that they are not fully across what is being asked of them.

The take home message here is that “HUMAN CONNECTION IS IMPORTANT”!

The following tips can help you maintain strong relationships, clear direction, and good psychological health whilst working remotely.

Fewer emails, more videoconferencing! If you are sending tons of emails, you may struggle communicating effectively. People may take things the wrong way or get confused. Up to 70% of communication is non-verbal so access to videoconferencing is really important. If you usually walk over to someone’s office to ask a question, make a call or use video conference instead...texting or emailing may seem easier, but it does not provide the incidental personal connections we value psychologically.

Be proactive, ensure people know you are engaged. Schedule 1:1 time with your manager regularly. Review what you are doing and planning. Keep a list of things to raise, questions to ask, and even documents you need to share. Review documents together and make changes as you go. Doing this generates mentoring interactions, and maintains communication. Send your manager and peers an end of week update of what you accomplish, and what your plan is for the next week.

If you normally work alone then schedule time with your friends or a colleague in a similar profession. It all helps.

Buddy-up and match work schedules. It can be challenging working at home, particularly if there are others present. Sometimes it’s easier to change your hours of work to ensure productivity. Check with your colleagues, make sure everyone in your team has a “buddy” working the similar hours so communication can overlap. Even roster your team to have rotating work buddies to ensure no-one is left isolated, excluded, and alone.

Good boundaries in your work space. A common barrier to productivity is an inadequate workspace. It will not work to sit on the couch, computer on your lap, in your PJ’s. This blurs lines of when your mind is meant to be at “ease” versus “active”. Make sure you have an appropriate and dedicated workspace. Leave your work in that workspace, so no cleaning up and packing down before having dinner!

Stick to a schedule for work/life balance. If your manager doesn't require set hours, implement them yourself. This will help create boundaries so work doesn't creep into your non-work life.

Other tips and technology

Walking meetings via phone: Stay active! We know how important this is for our mental and physical health.

Be clear with those at home: Sometimes it's helpful to be clear with those around you that you have "set work hours" even though you are home. Often timers set on phones, ovens, & watches can alert kids, or family that it is time for your "work break" and that's when you can assist them with incidental needs and requests. Think about having a 5 min stand-up meeting with those around you in the morning to schedule time and activities for all.

Lunch breaks: Make sure you have lunch together. If you have no-one at home with you schedule a lunch time chat with a colleague over the phone or via video conference – just as if you were meeting in the lunch room.

After work, go "home": When you stop working, turn off your computer, and change your clothes. Having a "work wardrobe" that is different from your "around the house" clothes is surprisingly effective way to make this transition and shift your mindset.

Apps that block out distractions:

Flora: Focus and Study in Forest (helps with procrastination) assists you put down the phone and be productive, limiting screen time, social media, games, and digital life.

Strict Workflow: helps structure your time with the Pomodoro method, a time management technique that has you divide your time into 25-min session of deep focus with breaks in-between.

Speak up if you are struggling!

If you feel left out, speak to your manager, or colleagues. Make sure every meeting, interaction via phone, has a component where you check in with how you are feeling. If you like a social environment, it is not uncommon to struggle being isolated from the work environment.