Birkbeck
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

MANAGING OUR WELLBEING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Managing our wellbeing in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to have a profound impact on the world of work. Across the globe people are facing unprecedented challenges and the world of work as we knew it has been turned upside down. As we transition into a new phase of working in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is important that we take time to look after ourselves so that we can stay healthy and well.

While many of us have worked remotely in some form before, many people are unable to take part in their usual routines, and many people are struggling to cope with the demands from work and home. This rapid change has been combined for some with concern about health, finances, being isolated from others and bereavement. It is normal to feel concerned and unsettled. In fact did you know that even before the outbreak 1 in 6 people experience mental ill health?

This guide has been designed to help you look after your wellbeing while working during the Covid-19 outbreak. It draws from the latest evidence to outline what works when it comes to working productively when experiencing stress. It has been developed by academics working in the Department of Organizational Psychology, who have extensive experience of supporting individual and organisational wellbeing across a range of context and contribute to national guidance in the field.

In this guide you will find information about mental health, what you can do, and what you can ask of others to give you the best chance of staying, and being productive, at work. The guide also encourages you to take a proactive approach by providing checklists that can be completed at regular points and shares useful resources that can be used to provide information and support.

What is in this guide?

- An introduction to stress, mental health and wellbeing
- Looking after your health and wellbeing
    - Ways of Wellbeing: Key lifestyle factors that protect wellbeing
    - The ABCs of Psychological Needs
    - Management standards for work stress: core principles for good work
    - Build your IGLOo for managing mental health while working during Covid-19
    - Other evidence-based approaches to managing health and wellbeing
- Managing your health and wellbeing whilst homeworking
- Managing the health and wellbeing of your team
- Further resources

An introduction to stress, mental health and wellbeing

Wellbeing is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as 'the state of being comfortable, healthy or happy'. It is subjective and personal but essentially helps to describe how people feel about their lives as a whole.[1]

Everyone's experience of wellbeing, stress and mental health is slightly different. People may display different signs or symptoms of stress, anxiety or depression while others might not show any at all. Often, we cannot tell by someone's behaviour alone. A more important sign is a **change** in the person's behaviour.

Some signs that you may have noticed in yourself or others include:

- **Behavioural signs** - struggling with workload, low levels of concentration and focus, difficulty in organising, low productivity, negative attitude, changes in motivation.
- **Emotional signs** - feeling anxious or irritable, mood changes, changes in how you interact with colleagues, too much emotion, feeling isolated or socially withdrawn.
- **Physical signs** – tiredness, having sleepless nights, increased drinking and/or smoking, not feeling hungry, headaches.

What causes stress and mental ill-health?

Sometimes there is no one obvious cause, however we do know that:

- Onset can be sudden, as a result of a specific event or experience
- It can creep up gradually as a result of accumulated pressures and demands
- It may be related to other conditions, such as chronic pain.

Fortunately, there is a large body of research that helps us understand what works when it comes to looking after our health and wellbeing. We have put together some useful information that will help you think about how you protect your mental health. These include:

- Ways of Wellbeing: Key lifestyle factors that protect wellbeing
- The ABCs of Psychological Needs
- Management standards for work stress: core principles for good work
- Build your IGLOo for managing mental health while working during Covid-19
- Other evidence-based approaches to managing health and wellbeing

[1] You can find a lot more information about Wellbeing collated by the What Works Wellbeing Centre: https://whatworkswellbeing.org/about-wellbeing/what-is-wellbeing/

Ways to Wellbeing: Key lifestyle factors that protect wellbeing

Research shows that there are some key things we can do to keep ourselves happy and healthy. While they might seem simple, when we start to feel under pressure, stressed or down, these simple things are the first to fall out of our routine.

What do you do to protect your wellbeing? Could you do more to help yourself feel happy and healthy?

Ways to wellbeing	Do I do enough of this?	Action to improve my wellbeing
Be active For example, walk, cycle, run, take up yoga. Find an activity that you enjoy.		
Connect with others For example, speak to a friend or colleague.		
Take notice For example, reflect on what is going on around you. Still your mind.		
Learn something new Learning new things helps us build self-esteem. For example, sign up for a course, learn a new skill from a friend, read a book.		
Give back Giving back to others makes us feel good. For example, volunteer in your community, help others with shopping/ tasks.		
Sleep well Ensure you have good quality sleep each night**.**		
Eat well Eat a healthy balanced diet.		
Anything else you enjoy doing and could do more of?		

The ABCs of psychological needs

If things seem uncertain or difficult in this time, or you are wondering how to get through this time, you may find thinking about the three ABCs of our basic psychological needs - **A**utonomy, **B**elonging and **C**ompetence useful. Understanding what they are and working towards meeting them can go a long way in maintaining our mental wellbeing and giving us some control in our lives. How we meet them doesn't matter, instead it is about taking actions that work for us and our particular circumstances.

A - Autonomy represents having freedom, influence and control over what we are doing. In this current time where many of us are restricted to our homes and where our employment status is uncertain, it might seem that we have much less autonomy than before. Although there is much we cannot control about the pandemic, we can control our behaviour (such as the way we behave towards others, the information we receive or our health promoting behaviours) Although challenging for many, the changes to work may even present as an opportunity to craft elements of our work to be more conducive to us.

Have a go at writing a list of what you can and can't control at the moment – and consciously let go of the things that you can't. Of those you can do, what can you put in place to enhance and embed these more strongly into your daily life?

B – Belonging is a fundamental need for humans. This means feeling connected, valued and supported by others. Although we are physically distanced from others, we do not need to be socially and emotionally distanced. More than ever we need to look at maintaining our social ties as best that we can. Broadly speaking, we need to be able to receive both emotional and informational support. For emotional support, reach out to others around you to share any concerns or worries that you might have – or just to chat. This may be developing stronger emotional connections with your work colleagues, or catching up with friends you haven't seen for a while. Informational support is about the more practical support that we need – see the section on further information and resources if you are keen to read more..

What sources of emotional support are you finding helpful at the moment. Can you do more to increase your levels of social connection? Is there anything you need in terms of informational support? Who in your network could signpost you to these resources?

C – Competence refers to the feeling that we can accomplish things and get things done. Of course, the current circumstances can make it difficult and we may find that our capacity has reduced, but we need to be able to feel that we are growing and learning as individuals, developing skills and gaining knowledge. To achieve this feeling of accomplishment, set yourself realistic goals. This may mean lowering your self expectations, but will allow you, when you reach your goal, feel a sense of competence. You may find that it helps to build your competence non-work areas, like learning new recipes, finishing the book that you have always wanted, or starting an exercise regime.

What can you do to increase those feelings of accomplishment in your daily life?

Management standards for work stress: core principles for good work

Work is good for our health and wellbeing, as long as it is properly designed and managed. There is a large body of research that indicates that there are six areas of work design that are important for our health and productivity. These form the Health and Safety Executive's Stress Management Standards.

Area of work	Is this area of work manageable? What works well?	What could be done differently to make things work better?
Demands e.g. workload, work patterns, environment		
Control e.g. how much say you have over when, how and where you do your work		
Support e.g. encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line managers and colleagues		
Relationships e.g. positive relationships, avoiding conflict and dealing with unreasonable behaviour		
Role e.g. understanding your role within the university, not holding conflicting roles		
Change e.g. how organisational change is managed and communicated		

What action can you take to do more of the things that work well?

What action can you take to make things work better?

If you identify an action that could help you work more effectively but need others to help you put it in place, discuss this with your team and/ or manager.

If you feel there are issues that are feeling unmanageable, but you cannot raise them with your manager and need advice and support, seek the advice of someone else in your department or service line, contact Human Resources or use an EAP service to discuss your concerns.

Build your IGLOo for managing mental health while working during

Understanding your IGLOo

We all need other people to help us stay happy and healthy. Everyone has their own set of resources inside and outside of work. We call this your **IGLOo**. Your **IGLOo** is made up of different resources that help you:

individual resources – like confidence, self-care and looking after your basic needs (e.g. eat, sleep, move, connect)

group resources – help from colleagues, friends and family

leader resources - help from your line manager, GPs or service provider

organisational resources – help provided by your organisation, volunteer groups or charities

Your IGLOo for staying mentally healthy at work during the Covid-19 outbreak includes:

At home the following actions help employees	Resources	At work, the following help employees
• Prioritising self-care • Establishing clear boundaries between work and leisure	Individual (you!)	• Creating structure in the working day – set out your working hours, break times, divide up tasks into smaller components • Identifying your work priorities – what must be done today, what can wait
• Understanding from others • Receiving non-judgmental support	Group	• Providing feedback on tasks from colleagues • Giving help when doing challenging tasks • Maintaining social and informal contact
• Accessing health and wellbeing advice and support • If you are experiencing mental health concerns: Having a consistent point of contact e.g. GP Facilitating links to external services and treatment	Leader	• Ensuring the necessary equipment to work safely is provided • Communicating work demands e.g. workload, prioritising job tasks • Giving control over the way the work is done • Providing emotional and practical support • Promoting positive working relationships in the team • Communicating the organisation's response to Covid-19 • Exploring work adjustments where appropriate e.g. working hours, review of job tasks • Being available to you but not intrusive • Agreeing what information about your current situation is communicated to colleagues
• Access to health and wellbeing advice and support • If you are experiencing mental health concerns: Accessing work-focused counselling	Organisation	• Providing flexible working practices and leave policies • Providing work-focused counselling • Demonstrating care through support • Establishing a culture where mental health is not stigmatised

Department of Organizational Psychology,
Birkbeck, Univeristy of London

April 2020

How strong is your IGLOo?

Use the checklist here to test the strength of your IGLOo and help you to build a strong IGLOo.

1. Look at the checklist. Read the statements in the 'Do I...' column. Think about whether you would answer 'yes', 'no' or 'sometimes'. Mark your answer in the column.
2. Use the checklist here to test the strength of your IGLOo. If you answer yes to these questions, you have a strong IGLOo. If you answer 'sometimes' or 'no' think about whether this would be helpful to you.
3. What else do you need/need to do? If you answer 'sometimes' or 'no' what needs to happen to make this part of your IGLOo stronger? It may be something you need to do, you need someone else to do, or you need to ask for.
4. How do you make this happen? Think about what you can do to make this happen. If you need someone else to do something, how can you ask them to do it? Need help and advice? Ask friends and family, colleagues, your line manager, GP, Human Resources, Occupational Health, charities/support groups, union reps

Remember...

For many people, working during the Covid-19 outbreak is not easy, but having support can make a huge difference.

If you are finding it difficult, ask a trusted colleague or friend to help you work through the questions and identify some concrete actions that you, or they, can take to help you build your IGLOo.

Resources	Location	Do I...?	Do I... Yes, No, Sometimes	I need to... *If you answered "sometimes" or "no", what else would be helpful?*	I can make this happen by... *Need help and advice? Ask friends and family, colleagues, your line manager, GP, Human Resources, Occupational Health, charity/support groups, union reps;*
Individual	Work	Create structure in the working day – e.g. divide up tasks into smaller components?			
		Identify work priorities – what must be done today, what can wait?			
	Home	Prioritise self-care?			
		Keep clear boundaries between work and leisure?			
Group	Work	Get feedback on tasks to build confidence?			
		Get help when doing challenging tasks?			
		Maintain social and informal contact with my team?			
Leader	Work	Have the necessary equipment to do my job safely?			
		Know what is demanded of me from my work e.g. workload, priorities of job tasks?			
		Have control over the way the work is done?			
		Have emotional and practical support?			
		Have positive working relationships in the team?			
		Know what the organisation's response to Covid-19 is?			
		Have access to work adjustments where appropriate e.g. working hours, review of job tasks?			
		Have access to my line manager if I need them?			
		Have an opportunity to control what my colleagues know about my personal situation?			
Organisation (HR)	Work	Work in a safe environment?			
		Know what the policies are for flexible working?			
		Know if our organisation provides work-focused counselling, and if so, do I know I can access it?			
		Work in an organisation where mental health and physical health are prioritised?			

Managing your wellbeing whilst homeworking

1. **Decide where at home work will happen.** One of the most common psychological challenges of homeworking is that of boundary management. If you can, choose one room to work from. Doing this maintains a psychological boundary between work and home, minimises disruption in your home and means you are less likely to be interrupted if you are sharing your home with others. Be mindful of decluttering and minimising distractions so that this physical space starts to occupy a work rather than personal context for you.

2**. Keep a regular routine.** Another way to maintain a psychological boundary between work and home whilst homeworking is to keep to a personal routine as similar to a 'normal day at the office' as possible. This means keeping your morning pre-work routine as normal as possible, for instance setting your alarm, showering and getting dressed. Although tempting, working in pyjamas is not good for either mental health or productivity!

3**. Have a clear end to your working day.** Without having the daily commute and the physical difference between home and work; and with our reliance on always available telecommunications, it is harder to actually stop work; and therefore homeworking can lead to a tendency to work 24-7. This puts us at a greater risk of stress and emotional exhaustion. Try and keep to a consistent end of day. You may find strategies such as setting an 'out of office' or having a separate telephone line for work (that you can switch off at the end of the day) helpful to support this. Think also about the negative impact that your 24-7 working may be having on your co-worker. Communicating your working hours, reinforcing this with your email signature, and using tools such as delayed send may also help support others mental health.

4**. Physiological health impacts upon psychological health.** Support yourself physiologically by conducting a risk assessment on your home-work environment. How could you maximise natural light and ventilation in your homeworking area? Are there any risks or trip hazards you could address? Think about the equipment that you will be using and whether it is fit for purpose. Think about your posture, for example the height of your desk and screen and the angles of your wrists to the keyboard. You can then use creative ways to adapt your workstation. Finally, are there any risks that your work could pose to others or do you need to protect your work from others? Consider how you might do this in your homeworking space.

5. Reach out to others. One of the most important psychological risks posed by homeworking is that of social isolation. There will be many people who are experiencing loneliness and isolation at the moment; on top of feeling anxious and fearful. In order to better manage both your mental health and that of others, be proactive in reaching out to others every day (be they colleagues, friends, family or those in your local community). Plan in regular meetings with colleagues; make adhoc communications with those you think may be most vulnerable to isolation, make use of virtual discussion forums to talk to others; research as much as possible so that you know who you can go to for help.

6. Keep on communicating with your co-workers about how are working. Generally, the way we work is influenced implicitly by our surroundings, our peers and our managers. When you are working consistently from home, this is harder and so make sure you communicate with your colleagues around the way that you can work. This may be discussing your working hours, how you prefer to communicate (i.e. IM, email, phone, video-conferencing) and how often you would like to communicate. You might find this changes over the course of the pandemic, or that your colleagues,

as they are getting used to the situation, are starting to slip back into old ways. If you are juggling homeworking and work, you might need to keep reminding your colleagues and renegotiating the way that you are working together. Relying on telecommunications has been shown to increase the likelihood of miscommunication; and without the social cues from physical contact this is more of a risk. Therefore acknowledge the difficulties this new way of working poses, talk openly and honestly, and follow a strategy that takes into consideration everyone's styles and needs.

7. Prioritise informal communication. Rather than a 'nice to have' or a distraction from the task, informal communication (i.e. non work conversations) has actually been found to be the 'social glue' that maintains and builds relationships and effective team working within organisations. Without being physically together (for instance meeting in the lift or at the kettle), the opportunities for adhoc informal communication are reduced and this presents a real risk to your ability to continue to work effectively. Ideas include setting time at the beginning of each meeting to 'check in' with your colleagues; holding social webinars (which could be regular 15 minute breaks when anyone homeworking and around can dial in), having a morning 'non-work huddle' with your team, putting in challenges such as 'best zoom background' or 'show and tell of objects/people/pets in your home' and planning three informal contact points per day (even if just a quick text).

8. Build in regular respite to your day. Without the social cues from the work environment (for instance people going for lunch or going to get a coffee), we are more likely when homeworking to sit at our desks all day without a break. This is detrimental both physiologically and psychologically. Breaks are necessary for us to cognitively recharge; and have been shown to be most effective when a) we are engaging in non-directed action (meaning that it is an unfocused activity such as having a chat with someone, going for a walk or meditating) and b) when it is your preferred activity. Take a break every 1 – 2 hours, focusing on respite and social connection. Avoid social media, news or TV. It is also important to build in your 'wind-down' time at the end of the working day. Generally we use our commute to and from work for this. In the absence of this, plan in a relaxing activity such as a walk, reading a book or a technique such as mindfulness and meditation to signal to yourself that you are finishing work for the day.

9. Remember health promoting behaviours. Homeworking is likely to have a detrimental impact on our health promoting behaviours; without the daily commute, set schedule and potentially our ability to go to the gym we are less likely to exercise; with the proximity of the kitchen at home are more likely to snack; and with extended working hours are less likely to sleep well. Health promoting behaviours have been shown to not just be important for physical health but also for protecting psychological health. Take time to consciously plan when and how you will exercise (for instance get fresh air during your breaks by walking around the block, or take an online exercise class), what you will eat and stick to standard working hours.

And finally...

10**. Be kind to yourself**. We are all, bar none, experiencing significant challenges at the moment. Although you still have the capability to work productively, you might not have the capacity (as a result of either emotional or physical barriers). Recognise your limitations, employ a strategy of 'good enough is good enough' and don't over extend yourself.

Managing the wellbeing and productivity of your team

1. Look after yourself first – and then be a role model

To look after your team effectively, you need to be healthy and fit. We have produced some tools for you to be able to manage your mental health generally, and to manage your wellbeing whilst homeworking. Reflect upon what you might change and develop in your ways of working to maintain your resilience throughout this period. Consider the impact that your wellbeing is going to have on your team, and so prioritise role modelling positive health behaviours to your team. Circulate the resources above to your team so that you can encourage them to build their own resilience and capacity at this time.

2. Focus on the individual within the team

Research has shown that when working with remote teams, managers need to take a more individual approach to managing than with a direct team. Therefore, rather than communicating to the team as a whole and having a standard management style, it is important to focus on a more individual approach where the aim is to build high quality relationships with each team member. This will enable you to pick up issues quickly and have more personal connections. This personal one-to-one approach is particularly important at the moment when your team members may be feeling frightened, lost and anxious, and where we all need to feel listened to.

3. Acknowledge the difficulties and the challenges

Everyone in your team will react differently to this situation and everyone will find different aspects challenging – no one is going to find it easy. Good and sustainable working practices won't just happen. Have an open, honest conversation with your team about the need for you all to work together, and recognise that it will be a learning process for all. Communicating remotely removes many of the social cues that we rely on at work, and therefore there is an increased risk of miscommunication and misunderstanding. This means that there will conflict and mistakes will be made along the way. It is important for you to clearly convey a learning, rather than a blaming, culture to your team.

4. Convey trust and shift your focus to outputs

Although there is the prevailing stereotype that when we are working from home we are 'dodging work', the fact is that the vast majority of people want to do a good job. The issue is that at the moment, many of us are not working in ideal contexts (for instance appropriate space to work, kids around) and so you need to trust that people will do the work, but it might not be when and how you expect or would traditionally want. Focus on outputs not processes, and consider revising some of your expectations and targets to enable your team to manage their environments.

5. Be clear on what everyone is working towards

When you are managing remote workers, you need to be much clearer on objectives and outcomes than you normally would because of the risk of miscommunication. As opportunities for adhoc sharing of information within the team or allocation of tasks is likely to be more challenging, you may need to facilitate this and manage this much more than you would when working with direct teams. You will also not have the social cues to pick up any misunderstanding or issues of

uncertainty about your briefs, and so you will need to make sure that you put in more time to sense check and to convey your expectations to your team.

6. Avoid a 'one size fits all' approach to flexible working

Research has shown that having a blanket policy on flexibility has been shown (for instance a four day working week) is ineffective as it will advantage some, and disadvantage others. Enable each team member to decide on the best hours of working for them; and communicate where possible, only within these times. It may be, if they are juggling children at home for instance that they start work very early (for instance 5am) and finish at lunchtime; or they may prefer to work in bursts across the day. Do set the expectation that your team members need to communicate how they will work with you, and ensure that you communicate what you expect from everyone over this time. Also be aware that this is not a linear process, and try and be flexible to changes in needs and demands as the weeks go on. Although you are taking this individual approach, be clear that you will still need your team to check in and respond; and there will be set times in the week when the whole team will need to get together for meetings and discussions that will need to be accommodated.

7. Agree a communication strategy

It is easy for us to assume that everyone likes to be communicated with in the same way as us, however in fact, different personalities and different homeworking arrangements predict different preferences. Discuss with your team what their preferences are and try to accommodate these methods of communication. Agree and share within the team what method of communication you will use for what types of communication and regularly check in to see that these agreements are still working for all. Bear in mind that miscommunication risk is high with telecommunications, particularly those with only written input; so if you are delivering complex or difficult messages, it may be better to phone or use a face-to-face virtual method of communication such as Skype or Zoom. Think also about the cognitive load of communicating remotely; a good rule is to have a break every 40 minutes or so to keep everyone's attention. This may mean avoiding long phone calls, or building in break-out sessions into communications. If you have any employees with disabilities or neurodiversities, pay particular attention to how remote working will challenge their working.

8. Prioritise informal communication and reach out

We often denigrate non work conversation as chit-chat or gossip and see it as taking time away from 'real work'. What research has shown however is that this informal conversation is the social glue that holds teams together and creates bonds at work. Without these social relationships, team working will begin to decline. We tend to use communication technology at work for transactional reasons (to get the message across to lots of people quickly, or to have a record of discussion) but we are going to have to reframe our use of technology to encompass relational communication. You can facilitate this by having for instance 10 minutes at the beginning of every team meeting for non-work chat; by having daily virtual coffee breaks (that the team can choose or choose not to attend) and social webinars. Be creative about increasing social communication – can you set up exercise classes for the team, online choirs or a competition? The more that you can do to support informal relationships, the better rewards you will see for work productivity.

One of the main psychological risks to remote working is social isolation. As the manager, ensure that you reach out to your team members and colleagues at work – not because of a work matter, but to check in with them. There will be those in your team who are really struggling with isolation and it may not be the ones that you would immediately expect – for instance it may not be those that live alone, but may be those extraverted team members that really thrive on the social contact at work. Consider setting up a peer support or buddying system for your team so that you spread the responsibility for this social networking.

9. Recognise and celebrate achievements

When employees are not there, it is easier to be 'out of sight out of mind' – and for employees to feel that they are forgotten. Remember to celebrate their achievements (which might be small wins such as completing marking in time) and communicate this to the rest of the team. Everyone is going to be working in much more challenging environments than they are used to, and so recognising that is vital. Above all, try and be kind and compassionate to your team members.

10**. Consider the health and safety of your team**
Whether remote or directly managing, you are still responsible for the health and safety of your team. Many are going from working in an ordered environment, to one of disorder, and so therefore it is important to consider the health and safety implications for all. For those of your employees with disabilities, impairments and neurodiversities, they are likely to have both developed a working style with colleagues, and have appropriate supportive equipment and materials. It is your responsibility as a manager to ensure that whilst homeworking, they are still reasonably equipped to do their role. For some, this may mean providing appropriate software and equipment at home; and for others, such as those with neurodiversities, it will be about being mindful of the impact of homeworking upon them and making reasonable adjustments. Talk to your team openly and honestly about about health and safety and physiological health and ask what additional support they might need to enable them to do continue to do their job. You might find using a risk assessment checklist helpful to prioritise where support is most needed.

11. Set clear boundaries between work and leisure time at home – and encourage your team to do the same.
When we are working at home it can be difficult to switch off as we can always be available for one more email or call. This is especially the case when everyone in the team is working flexibly, and therefore may be sending emails or request calls at different times of the day. Set clear boundaries for working hours, share them with your team and encourage them to do the same. This way you can ensure that everyone feels they have the permission to switch off and enjoy their leisure time.

Where to find further information

Your GP or your workplace Employee Assistance Programme

Your GP is often the first point of contact when you are feeling unwell. They will be able to provide access to local resources and, if required, therapeutic treatments.

Many organisations have an employee assistance programme to provide staff with a free and confidential support service. EAPs are often accessed through a confidential hotline or online with a unique code for your organisation.

Further free-to-access resources

1. Looking after your mental health

Every Mind Matters-
https://campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/resources/campaigns/82-every-mind-matters

Mind- https://www.mind.org.uk/

Samaritans https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/workplace/

2. Tips to help you talk about mental health

Time to talk- https://take-time-to-talk.com/

Encouraging a conversation about mental health at work-
https://www.time-to-change.org.uk/sites/default/files/2.%20Tool_Starting_the_Conversation.pdf

ACAS managing challenging conversations-
https://www.acas.org.uk/media/3409/Challenging-conversations-and-how-to-manage-them/pdf/Challenging-conversations-and-how-to-manage-them.pdf

3. Resources, tools and guides to help you manage mental health at work

Mental Health at Work https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/

4. Resources to support return to work following mental health sickness absence

Thriving at Work: Sustainable return to work http://www.affinityhealthatwork.co.uk/our-research

5. Professional advice and support:

CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) https://www.cipd.co.uk/
IOSH (Institution of Occupational Safety and Health) https://www.iosh.co.uk/
HSE (Health and Safety Executive) http://www.hse.gov.uk/
ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1461
DRC (Disability Rights Commission) http://www.drc.org.uk/

6. Evidence summaries and evidence based resources for work, health and wellbeing

Affinity work, health and wellbeing hub http://affinityhealthhub.co.uk/

Other evidence-based approaches to managing health and wellbeing

No one solution works for everyone. You might need to try a few different approaches before you find something that feels right and works for you. **There is research evidence that the following have promise for improving employees' health and wellbeing:**

- **Gratitude practices**
  Taking time to notice things around you and reflecting on what you are thankful for can help us to experience positive emotions. Keeping a gratitude diary can help to re-programme our brains and kick start a cycle of positive thoughts. We can be grateful for anything – even the smallest of things. You can use a note book and note three things you are grateful for each day or there are lots of free apps where you can make note of what you are grateful for. The basic principle is that you take time to take notice, and make this a regular habit.

- **Journaling**
  Free form journaling has been found to be helpful for many people, writing about your thoughts, feelings and emotions can help you make sense of your experiences. All you need is a piece of paper or you could try a video diary.

- **Goal setting – WOOP**
  If you are struggling to meet your goals, you won't be alone. When we are under pressure, it becomes even harder to meet our goals and often we forget simple principles of goal setting. The WOOP approach which helps you to specify your goal or WISH, the desired OUTCOME, the potential OBTICLE and the PLAN to reach your goal has been found to help. See www.woopmylife.org for practical tips.

- **CBT - Cognitive Behavioural Therapy**
  CBT is a talking therapy that can can be used to change the way you think. It focuses on your current problems, rather than focusing on your past, and can give you strategies to stop negative thoughts developing into a downward spiral.
  See https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cognitive-behavioural-therapy-cbt/

- **Mindfulness practices**
  It can be easy to rush through life and not pause to be in the present moment. Mindfulness practices aim to encourage us to stop to notice the world around us.
  See https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness/

- **ACT – Acceptance and Commitment Therapy**
  ACT uses acceptance. Mindfulness, commitment and values based strategies to develop psychological flexibility. Rather than try to control our thoughts, ACT teaches us to recognise or notice our thoughts, and accept these as thoughts rather than feel compelled to act on them.
  See https://contextualconsulting.co.uk

- **Self-compassion focused practices**
  Self compassion refers to acting the same way towards yourself as you would a friend. Often we are much more critical and unforgiving towards ourselves than we are towards others. Self-compassion practices can help us to be more kind, forgiving and compassionate to ourselves.

- **Work-focused counselling**
  There are many different forms of counselling, however in addition to focusing on personal issues employees who struggle with their mental health report developing strategies to cope with specific aspects of work that are worrisome or provoke anxiety can be helpful. See information about Birkbeck's EAP service in the Further information section for information about counselling provision for staff.'

About these guidelines

This guide has been developed by the Department of Organizational Psychology, Birkbeck, University of London. Drawing from their own research and extensive experience supporting individuals and organisations in workplace wellbeing, the team have curated practical evidence-based resources to help people navigate the challenges to maintaining mental health presented by Covid-19 pandemic.

About the Department of Organizational Psychology

The Department of Organizational Psychology – launched in 1962 as the first of its kind in the UK – focuses on understanding and influence the world of work through the fields of Occupational Psychology, Organisational Behaviour, Human Resources, Management Consultancy and Coaching. As 21st century organisations and businesses of all kinds are evolving and changing more rapidly than ever, understanding and managing those changes effectively is at the heart of what we do. We are research-driven, leading the field in creating new knowledge and pushing boundaries in a wide range of specialist academic areas. But we're also successful communicators through teaching, influencing policy and professions, and working closely with organisations to solve problems that they are facing.

Dr Jo Yarker

An organizational psychologist, specialising work, health and well-being. Her work focuses on supporting people to thrive at work, particularly when they are experiencing times of challenge or vulnerability. Jo leads the Professional Doctorate in Organizational Psychology at Birkbeck, University of London and is co-Director of Affinity Health at Work, working in a job share arrangement with Rachel Lewis across both roles.

Dr Rachel Lewis

A registered occupational psychologist, specialising in work, health and well-being. Her work focuses on understanding how those working in inherently stressful and difficult occupations and job roles, continue to do what they do. Rachel leads the Professional Doctorate in Organizational Psychology at Birkbeck, University of London and is co-Director of Affinity Health at Work, working with Jo Yarker in a job share arrangement across roles.

Professor Almuth McDowall

A Professor of Organisational Psycholoy and heads up her department as one of the assistant deans in BEI. Her research is driven by practical issues and focused on helping individuals and organisations better balance their working lives, as well as how do foster professional learning and development.

Dr Kevin Teoh

A Chartered Psychologist and the Programme Director of the MSc Organizational Psychology at Birkbeck, University of London. His primary research interests are around developing healthier workplaces, and the translation of research into practice, policy and public dissemination.

Birkbeck
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Join the UK's only evening university
Gain University of London qualifications
Study in a world-class research environment

@BirkbeckUniversityofLondon

@birkbeckuol

Birkbeck, University of London

@birkbeckuol

Birkbeck, University of London

LONDON'S EVENING UNIVERSITY