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Empowering practitioners to work differently  
Caring for employees' mental health

**COVID-19 Response**

# Empowering practitioners to work differently

## Caring for employees' mental health during COVID-19

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The COVID-19 pandemic isn't just a physical health issue—it's also a mental health issue and requires special attention from all of us.

We are clearly in unprecedented times; with 24-hour media messaging; various—often divergent—views on social media; working in isolation; managing work alongside caring responsibilities; a fast-moving environment; and an overwhelming sense of uncertainty. In situations like this it is common to experience heightened stress and anxiety.

The sudden move to remote work brings its own challenges from a mental health perspective, including feelings of isolation and loneliness through a lack of face-to-face collaboration, as well as unclear boundaries between work and personal time.

Many of people are needing to juggle priorities in a new way—caring for themselves while also caring for children who are home from school and potentially caring for others.

As leaders it is your role, and your obligation now more than ever, to demonstrate compassion and make time for your people when they need it. This will strengthen your teams now and long into the future.

This guide has been developed to support team leaders and their teams, during this time of uncertainty.

You will find resources for team leaders as well as practitioners on how to strengthen mental resilience and care for each other.

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# Looking after yourself

It is important that you take care of your own well-being, This will enable you to care for others as well.

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When dealing with stressful situations and negative emotions it can help to focus on the things you can control:

## 1. Keep up your physical strength

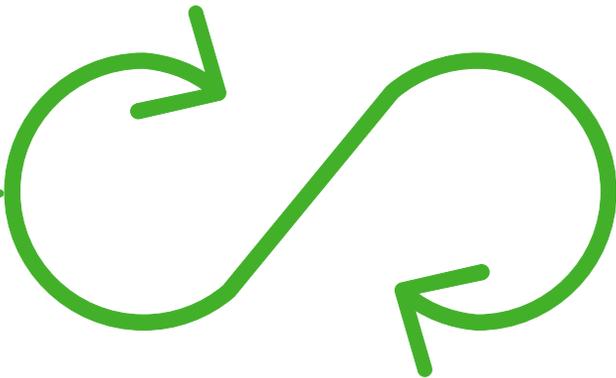
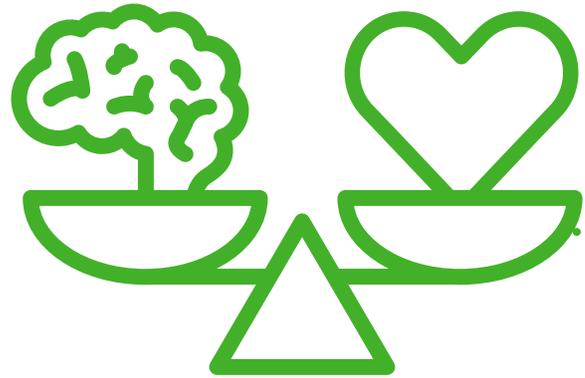
Where your physical health permits, get regular exercise, stay hydrated and eat regularly. Make sure you have enough medication available to you. If you are in self-isolation, ensure that you can have food delivered to your home.

## 2. Stay connected

For many, working from home will present challenges and opportunities. One thing it will do is require keeping in touch with people in different ways than normal. Social media, phone, video call or email can all be used to stay close to people.

## 3. Strive for the right balance

Try to maintain boundaries between work and personal life—be aware of being 'always on' and establish a routine for your working hours and a clear switch off each day.



#### 4. Work on your mental health

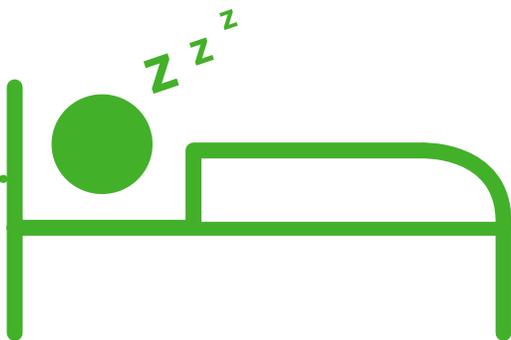
Our emotions and how we experience them can impact our actions and decision making; here are some tips on managing stress and anxiety:

- Limit how much news you consume—Balance need to know information with uplifting content (gather just the key facts to remain safe and avoid ruminating on things out of your control)
- Be mindful of your intake of substances that can affect your emotions and mood like caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol
- Take a break, or multiple small breaks, to replenish energy—Watch a funny video or listen to your favorite song to help you refocus
- Take a few deep breaths—Inhale 5 seconds, hold 3 seconds, exhale 5 seconds
- Engage in physical activity—Move around and stretch while on a call. If your situation permits, take a walk outside and get some fresh air
- Where you can, try to get enough sleep—7–9 hours per night is recommended to restore brain chemistry and heal your body
- Practice gratitude—Think about 3–5 things you are grateful for

- Spread digital acts of kindness—Send supportive text messages, emails or make a call
- Remind yourself throughout your day that you are not going through this alone
- Press pause and reflect—Ask yourself what does this situation require of me? Switch off autopilot and gain clarity about the outcome you are pursuing



- Find purpose by supporting your community. Though in-person volunteer opportunities may be limited, consider donations or other virtual support
- Recognize your body language—We can change our own body chemistry simply by changing our body positions. Maintaining a relaxed posture for just two minutes can lead to a 25% decrease in cortisol levels (the body's stress hormone)



**If stress or anxiety interferes with your ability to function, reach out to your personal physician or local medical providers.**

# Looking after colleagues

COVID-19 comes with unique challenges for everyone. The inability to control a situation can create a major source of anxiety and can add to stress levels.

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Here are a few ways you can care for others and strengthen sense of community:

## 1. Keep in touch

Remember that some colleagues may be feeling isolated and anxious; now, more than ever, is the time to keep in touch—Both to check in and to ensure they understand that there is help available. A quick note or call will help someone reconnect. Also, make plans for a regular catch up—either one-on-one or as a team

## 2. Ask 'Are you OK?'

These three words can make all the difference to someone who isn't feeling OK

## 3. Collaborate to find working arrangements that work

Stress and anxiety from the situation we are facing can be made worse by concern over work activities and deadlines—Encourage team members to talk about the challenges they face when working from home and collaborate to find a solution. Find out what will work best for them when it comes to the way and hours that they work. Remember the importance of judging on output, not being present or “online”

## 4. Take a step back

Fear can narrow our field of vision, making it harder to see the bigger picture or available options including the positive possibilities in front of us—Acknowledge the anxieties your colleagues may be feeling and take time to explore options and a positive outcome of the current situation





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