

# Managing your team remotely



A guide for leaders to help manage your team remotely

With many organisations now working remotely, we understand that this requires a shift for many managers and leaders to enable support, maintain productivity and most importantly maintain the safety of their teams. While we know that some people work remotely already, the shift to have an entirely remote workforce can be daunting. MetLife 360Health has some simple tips that may help you in this time and see the positives in what is a difficult time.

## Understanding the challenges

Before solving the issues, we need to acknowledge the challenges:

1. **Speed of change** – this happened suddenly so there may not be a guide or training for how to do this best.
2. **Lack of face to face supervision** – this is an issue for some people in the office – it can be amplified when remote.
3. **Access to information** – what was once as simple as walking to someone's desk has now become more complicated and online systems, remote network access can be more difficult.
4. **Interpersonal challenges** – not being able to see engagements between team members as easily due to non-verbal cues being absent.
5. **Distractions at home** – which can include suboptimal workspaces, unexpected parenting requirements and general anxiety of the unknown.
6. **Mental health concerns** – there is a real risk in these circumstances that both team members and managers will be at a heightened risk of mental health issues that need to be addressed.

**65%** indicated providing flexibility in the work schedule was important. This could include scheduling meetings to avoid busy household times such as before 10am or after 4pm.<sup>1</sup>

**91%** of people working from home full time state their employer response to COVID-19 was between good and excellent overall.<sup>1</sup>

**54%** said it was appealing for work to provide financial support/subsidies to set up home workstations, such as chairs or monitors.<sup>1</sup>

## How can managers support their teams effectively?

1. **Establish daily structured check ins** – we all need structure, this could be one on one calls, team calls and setting some boundaries on hours, expectations and redefining goals. Providing information is critical – at this point in time over communicating is better.
2. **Use different communication channels** – emails are common enough but with social distancing, people need to hear voices, see faces and get visual cues to support their mental health. Phone calls are fine but where possible use video conferencing. It is good for your team and good for you. Messaging services such as Skype, WhatsApp can be good alternatives for quick messages to individuals or teams.
3. **Set rules of engagement** – set regular meeting times, let team members know when/how to best reach you. Keep an eye on intra team communication and encourage collaboration.
4. **Set up a social structure** – perhaps use WhatsApp for team banter and Skype or other business messengers for quick updates on work. It is good to separate these channels so people are aware of any boundaries. Importantly – set up a weekly social gathering – virtual coffee, virtual drinks or pizza. More than ever, we need to have fun when possible.
5. **Listen and offer support** – this is the critical item. With less visual cues, it is important to listen and more important to acknowledge anxiety as normal and empathise with people's situations. Ask how people are, listen to their answer carefully and then restate their answer back to them. If you are concerned about a team members mental health be open and transparent about your concerns with the team member.
6. **Understand each of your team's situation** – while your team is still employed; the team member's spouse, partner or family member may not be and this could be impacting their anxiety levels. They may have children at home requiring attention or they may have a sick relative or friend. Find out what you can and keep a close eye on more vulnerable team members. Work with your team members dealing with these issues and provide them with alternatives and solutions. If you are concerned connect them to your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or with Human Resources.
7. **Be positive** – employees will pick up quickly on your own verbal and physical cues – if you remain positive it is more likely that they will too. It is also important to remember that even leaders get anxious and it is important to acknowledge this and speak with your own manager.

## What are the cues I should be looking for?

There are several signs to look out for that could indicate someone is at risk of a mental health condition. See our flyer on the understanding the signs for more information on what to look for if you are worried about one of your team.

1. MetLife's COVID-19 Insights research, April 2020

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## Where to get help if you think you need it?

If you think one of your team members or you need help and are not coping, here are some links and numbers to contact. Reaching out is winning, it should not be considered defeat:

- **SANE Australia** (people living with a mental illness)  
Phone: 1800 18 7263
- **Beyond Blue** (anyone feeling depressed or anxious)  
Phone: 1300 22 4636 or chat online
- **Black Dog Institute** (people affected by mood disorders)  
Online help
- **Lifeline** (anyone having a personal crisis)  
Phone: 13 11 14 or chat online
- **Suicide Call Back Service** (anyone thinking about suicide)  
Phone: 1300 659 467



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