Coronavirus – Working from Home and Self-Isolation

Across Britain people are making big changes to their work routine and millions of people are working from home for the first time. This will mean quite an adjustment for lots of people. Working away from the office has implications for workers and managers.

Even in normal times it's important for peoples' wellbeing to make sure they are connected to their colleagues and their work if they are not coming into the workplace – at a time of serious anxiety, keeping an eye on your wellbeing and your colleagues' wellbeing will be really important.

It's important for Employers to ensure that nobody is injured or made ill through their work – and that includes people working from home in a national crisis.

In an age where work and life need to integrate much more successfully, remote working can be a wonderful thing. But it is also full of pitfalls for both managers and employees.

Home worker or lone worker?

Employers need to be aware that their home workers are lone workers and should be treated as such, particularly when it comes to mental health and wellbeing.

The rise in home working has mirrored the rise in technology. Robust broadband means employees can now check-in with the office from the spare room, coffee shop or just about anywhere with an internet connection.

Benefits to employers are obvious; finances improve as overheads like office space and other facilities are offset as employers provide their own workspace. Workers often report increased motivation from the flexibility that remote working offers, increasing productivity and staff retention.

However, like the railway engineer and security guard the home worker is still classified as a lone worker; something often overlooked by employers.

Tips for Managers with home-working staff or those in isolation

For Managers;

1	**Keep Employees 'in sight and in mind' –** Remote or home working can negatively impact resilience as people can feel they are 'out of sight, out of mind. Employers should consider showing emotional intelligence and encourage strong social network connections. Taking care to ensure that interactions via email etc. are managed with sensitivity and consideration for an employee who is working remotely is key.
2	**Proactively Manage Communication Challenges –** Communication when managing employees long-distance can be particularly difficult and require a little additional thought. Be sure to keep in touch with your employee's regularly and check in on the person and not just their work.
3	**Schedule Communication –** One way to do this is scheduling 1-to-1s and team meetings using a programme like skype. Engaging with your workforce regularly will create a connected and open environment which will encourage employees to speak out and start the conversation about any mental health or wellbeing, along with their workload.
4	**Signpost Mental Health Support –** Make sure your workforce is aware of your HR Department's services, Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) if you have one.
5	**Encourage Balance –** It's important to encourage your workforce to establish a clear work-life balance to ensure that they do not develop unhealthy working habits such as; working longer hours; checking and responding to emails at night and weekends etc. Encourage them to develop daily routines; eating a healthy and balances diet; and ensuring they incorporate exercise of some kind into their days too.

Tips for Employees working from home

There is no doubt that as well as the anxiety provoked by a potentially deadly virus and no toilet roll or pasta in the supermarket, we are also facing the very likely fact that many workers will be being plunged into home working for the first time, to speak nothing of the potential requirements for isolation.

Some of those workers may already have experience of a day or so a week, but few of them will have worked full time from home and few of their managers will have managed large teams in such a situation either.

For Employees;

1	**Routine –** Start the day with a routine. Get dressed, go for a walk, prioritise your jobs.
2	**Workstation –** You may not have the perfect work place or equipment, but get a supportive chair, or consider a stand-up desk. Get up regularly to stretch.
3	**Work Environment –** Find a space away from the main home area if possible and definitely not in your bedroom, a plant helps.
4	**Minimise Distraction –** We produce much better work when we are focused on one thing. Move your phone out of the way, get rid of all the apps which distract you. Get that big thing done early in the morning.
5	**Socialisation –** This is the big one. We all need to talk to others. If physical contact isn't possible, use technology like Zoom or Skype.
6	**Food –** Think about food prep for the week. Can you batch cook on Sunday? Have healthy snacks in, otherwise you'll eat the chocolate!
7	**Fresh air –** Get out at least once, ideally twice a day for a walk, run or cycle.

8	**Regular Breaks and Exercise –** Every 25 minutes get up and stretch, breathe, go outside, go up and down the stairs, anything to move your poor sedentary body! Remind yourself by drinking a lot of water (so you have to get up) or setting an alarm.

**For further information contact the
BPIF Health & Safety Team**

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