

Working from Home - Maintaining Employee Mental Health and Wellbeing

The pandemic has led to many staff working from home and although lockdown restrictions are easing, for many, the current working situation is likely to continue for an extended time.

A UK 2019 report, State of Remote Work, identified that 49% of remote workers felt their biggest challenge was maintaining mental wellness; 22% reported they could not unplug from work, 19% felt lonely, and 8% could not stay motivated. With the challenges of home schooling, caring responsibilities, stress and anxiety related to the impact of COVID-19, and trauma fatigue associated particularly with the health, charity and social care sectors, it is likely that these figures have considerably increased.

As the employer, trustees of organisations have a duty of care for both the physical and mental wellbeing of their staff. It is essential they keep regular contact with the lead officer, provide opportunities for staff to voice how they are feeling and offer support and signposting to resources and practical help. A suggested framework is:

- Keep in contact - As managers, maintain your supervision structure and timetable, and use a variety of methods to check-in. Don't forget the power of the 'phone to speak to people – one to one over the phone often elicits more than more than a formal meeting.
- Promote a healthy life work balance – Encourage staff to take regular breaks, spend time out doors (Vitamin D deficiency is major cause of low mood), book annual leave, and be flexible, where operationally possible, over how hours are worked across a day or week. Be open to adapt working hours and activities if personal circumstances require it and keep a record of what you have agreed.
- Schedule regular team meetings and more informal opt-in catch ups - Use staff attendance as a benchmark for mental wellbeing and always check-in if staff don't attend. It may be an indicator that they are not coping and can't express that in front of the team.
- Give permission to say 'no' – There is a tendency to over work and over promise in an emergency, particularly when that work is taking place in the home environment. Consistently remind staff that they can prioritise work, have longer turnaround times for non-critical work, and that there is some work which cannot be taken on at this time.
- Provide mental health training and resources (see a selection below).
- Encourage kindness, for yourself, and your staff - These are extraordinarily challenging times and some days we simply cannot achieve what we would hope to. It's okay.

Toolkits and Resources

Mind Mental Health Toolkit: National Charity Mind have developed a very helpful toolkit – [Coronavirus: coping with the challenges of working from home](#). Split into sections, topics include [Building your wellbeing and helping you cope](#) and techniques to improve [Focus](#).

Every Mind Matters: is [a set of online NHS resources](#) to support good mental and physical health, with guides and activities such as breathing techniques and mindfulness exercises.

NHS Fitness Studio: Access [24 instructor-led videos](#) suitable for all abilities and fitness levels including aerobics, strength and resistance, pilates and yoga.

Rethink Mental Illness: This charity aims to make sure everyone affected by severe mental illness has a good quality of life. It offers advice and information on a wide range of mental illnesses and issues, such as depression, anxiety disorders, rights and benefits and support for carers. The '[Get Help Now](#)' button includes information on what to do in a crisis and links to a range of helplines including the Samaritans, The Mix, and Silverline.

Papyrus: This is the national charity dedicated to the prevention of young suicide, the biggest killer of young people under 35 in the UK. They offer a range of support, including [HOPELINEUK](#) (0800 068 4141) that provides confidential support and advice to young people struggling with thoughts of suicide and anyone that is worried about them – professionals, family, friends.

Mindfulness Apps: There are a wide range of mindfulness apps available, most chargeable, but all offer trials and some ongoing free elements to them, such as Calm or Headspace. [The Independent](#) have a useful overview to help find what might be right for you. Free music apps, such as Scala or Accuradio, can also be helpful to provide music to work and relax to.

Local Support and Services

Richmond Borough Mind Mental Health Helpline - 020 3137 9590:

Monday to Friday: 9.00am to 10.00pm

Saturday: 2.00pm to 10.00pm

Sunday: 2.00pm to 8.00pm

A free confidential listening and support service, available 7 days a week, for anyone over 18 years old living in the borough of Richmond upon Thames. It offers a safe place to speak to someone who will listen, offer support and guide you to further help, if needed. Feelings such as low mood, stress and anxiety can impact our mental health, and sometimes you just need to talk. RB Mind listeners are trained mental health workers who listen with compassion and without judgement. You will not be asked for personal information unless you would like them to find immediate help from other services for you. It is not a counselling service but they can advise you on counselling and talking therapies available through [Richmond Borough Mind](#) and the [Richmond Wellbeing Service](#).

Local Resilience Workshops: [RB Mind](#) have also developed a 2-hour online workshop for staff and volunteers working in the voluntary sector in Richmond - Building Resilience in Challenging Times. For future dates and information, email info@rbmind.org.

Covid Anxiety Workshops: These are being run regularly by the [Richmond Wellbeing Service](#). People can [self-refer](#) and can request to attend but will still have the regular mental health screening to ensure that any additional appropriate support is offered.

Prepared by Heather Mathew - June 2020