



# Supporting your team through COVID-19: a manager's guide.

Practical advice, useful tips and  
expert insight to help everyone.

**For your team's wellbeing.**

May 2020.

# Keeping you updated in uncertain times.

**The coronavirus pandemic has changed our working lives. We are all at greater risk of stress, loneliness, exhaustion and sickness, especially those running a business. Looking after our health and wellbeing is more important than ever as we all try to adjust to a new normal way of working.**

Physically, changes in your routine may cause or exacerbate muscle, bone and joint problems. While mentally, you may be stressed, under new pressures and dealing with a lot of uncertainty. We know you have lots on your mind including employee wellbeing. At a time when we all might feel overwhelmed, this is something we can help you manage.

This guide contains reliable information and tips to help support you to look after your employees' wellbeing during these challenging times.



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You

Your team

Ten team support tips

# Looking after yourself.

**It's never been more important to look after yourself. Staying healthy will help you focus on your business and look after your employees.**

Your team will look to you for reassurance and guidance. Positive leadership can help reassure staff and boost morale.

- **Think about what you need to stay well** – for example, exercise, connectivity, sleep, a healthy diet and relaxation activities. Make sure you take time for these. Put a 'wellbeing break' in your calendar each day and encourage your team to do the same. This could be time with the kids, exercise, gardening, meditation or reading a good book.
- **Lead by example.** Share your own achievements and challenges. Tell the team how you are coping and how you look after yourself.
- **Be authentic.** Let your team know if you are struggling. Share your own concerns. Being open and honest about your own feelings will encourage your staff to talk about their own needs and concerns too – and allow others to support you too.

## **Remember you are not alone**

Managers and business owners are trying to work out how to respond to this crisis in a way that is fair to employees and to the business. Find other people to talk to. Share ideas to help you work out how to manage these new challenges. You may have your own professional network already. Social media can also be great for this. Ask a question on LinkedIn or join in a Twitter chat (for example **#askcipd**).



# Confident management for a healthy team.

Our Workplace Wellbeing Census shows that flexible working, recognition and positive support from line managers are key for staff wellbeing.

Getting the basics of good management right will help your team and enhance their commitment to your business. Your support during this crisis will be remembered and valued.

## Be flexible

Flexible management is vital right now. You need to understand how much time your staff are realistically able to work, and to adjust your plans and workloads accordingly. Ask staff members individually about their caring responsibilities and needs. A homeworking questionnaire such as [this one from CIPD](#) might help.

Be flexible with technology too. Some organisations prefer video calls for speed and connection, whereas others find online documents and discussion gives everyone access to conversations and shared knowledge.

Be prepared for some trial and error while you work out what's right for your team.

Being flexible now will motivate your team and empower them to manage their own time, both now and in the future.

## Be approachable

In our Wellbeing Census, 71% of people said that having an approachable manager helped them feel comfortable enough to raise a wellbeing issue.

Let staff know they can come to you whenever they need to discuss a concern. Give them the time they need. If you really can't straightaway, let them know why and arrange another time as soon as possible.

## Celebrate success

If employees feel that the reward they get for their work is lower than the effort they put in, they may be more at risk of common mental health problems and increased stress.

Let people know you value their patience, understanding, contribution and support. Recognise and celebrate achievements at this difficult time.

# 71%

**of people said that having an approachable manager helped them feel comfortable enough to raise a wellbeing issue.**



# Taking care of your team.

**Your team are individuals with different health needs. Some of these will have changed as the coronavirus pandemic transforms our working lives.**

Your support can help your team stay well. A strong, healthy team will be more capable of dealing with new demands, now and in the future.

Staff with existing physical or mental health conditions may already have [reasonable adjustments](#) in place to help them work effectively. These may need to be reviewed to make sure they have the right support to help them work safely at home.



Physical health

Mental health

Furloughed staff

High-risk groups





## Physical health.

It's more important than ever to look after our physical health. Staying healthy can boost our immune system and help us fight off illness. A healthy workforce means you will lose fewer days to sickness, at a time when you need all hands on deck.

### Staying up to date with [COVID-19](#)

- **Remind** staff of the NHS guidelines regularly.
- **Ask** staff if there is anything else they feel they need in order to stay safe at work.
- **Share** information on what they should do if they or someone they live with shows symptoms. Employees should also know how to get an isolation note from NHS 111 and what sick pay they are entitled to.

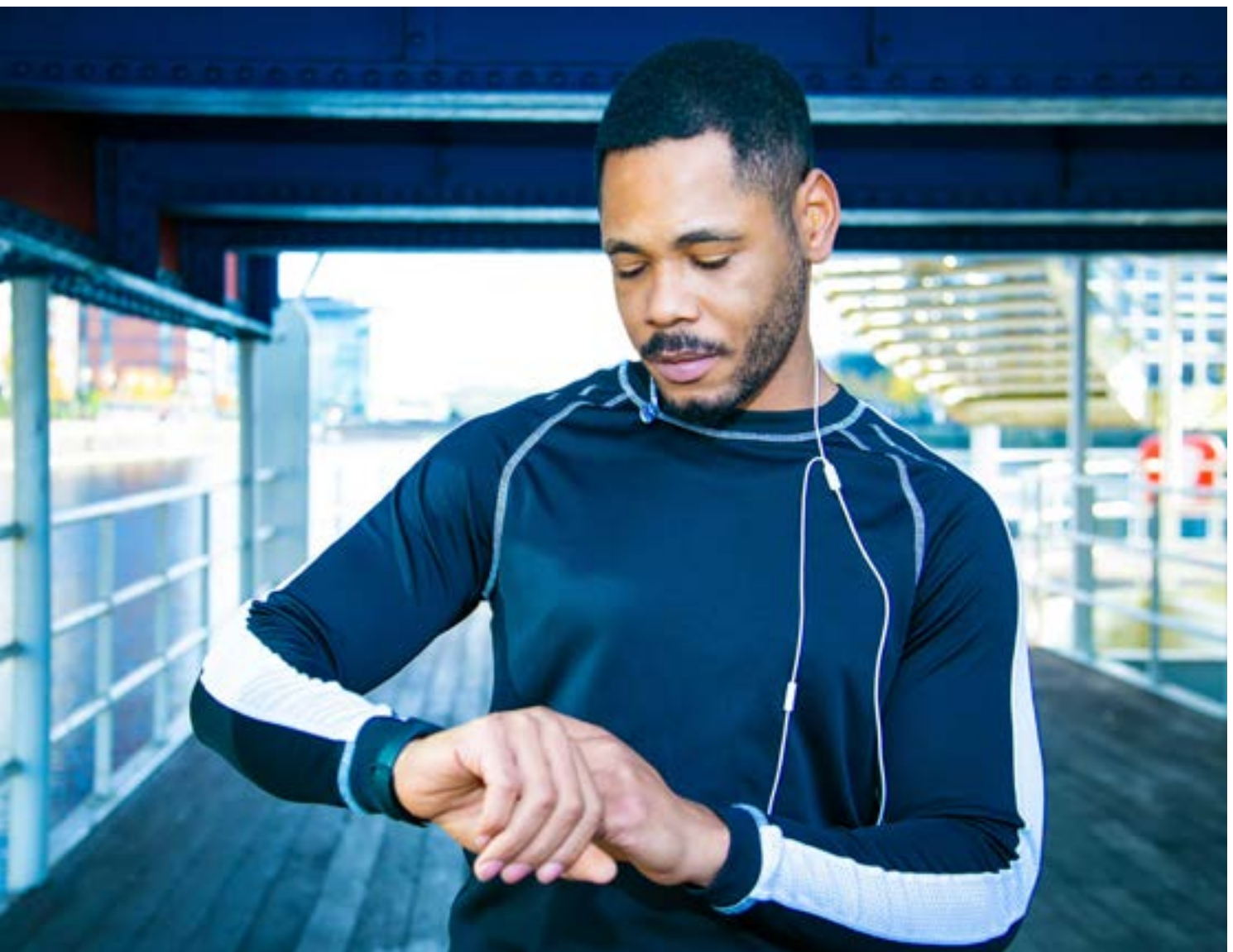
### Encouraging healthy habits

Everyone's routines have changed, more people than ever are working from home. Think about what these changes might mean for staff wellbeing. Your team may move about less without the commute and office space to stretch their legs between meetings. They may not have appropriate desk space or equipment. It's much easier for the lines between home and work to become blurred.

- Ask all your team to do a [workstation assessment](#) and let you know what, if anything, they need. Those with existing health conditions may need additional specialist equipment if they are to do their job effectively from home. It is your responsibility to provide any [reasonable adjustments](#).



- It may not be possible to do workstation assessments in person at the moment. But you can share information with your team about looking after their posture at home. Employees should sit at a table and position their screen at eye level. There's more information about [setting up an office space at home here](#).
- Set up alerts to remind you and your team to move about. We should all get up and stretch at least every hour. [Chair yoga](#) is also a good option.
- Schedule breaks into the day and encourage your team to take a proper lunch break.
- Don't schedule meetings back to back. Try to make sure everyone has five minutes between meetings to stretch away from their desk.
- Encourage your team to exercise. Some people prefer to exercise alone but others might like group yoga or [HIIT](#) sessions. If you can schedule these within working hours, it will help people with caring responsibilities to attend.
- If you don't need to see each other for a call, think about whether you could have a 'walking meeting' while you both catch up on the phone.







## Mental health and wellbeing.

Small actions can make a big impact. For example, finding time to talk with an employee about their wellbeing is often appreciated. Encourage everyone to look after their mental health and take active steps to stay connected. Only half of people who struggle with a mental health issue speak to their manager about it. As a manager of a team, you can improve working practices, encourage your team to speak openly, and reassure them you will offer support. There are resources on the Bupa website to help you [start the conversation](#) with your team.

### Building a sense of community

Working from home can be isolating, especially if people live alone. Even if they have a family around them, they may feel disconnected from their team. Loneliness can have a negative impact on our mental health.

Half of all employees who answered our Wellbeing Census said that colleagues had a positive impact on their wellbeing at work. Which suggests that having a good relationship with people we work with is important. And it's good for business. When we feel connected with colleagues, our enthusiasm goes up, our morale rises and we are more inclined to get the job done.

**Only 1 in 2**  
of people who  
struggle with  
a mental health  
issue speak  
to their manager  
about it.

Mind survey of 44,000 employees, 2018.



**“Half of all employees said that colleagues had a positive impact on their wellbeing at work.”**

Bupa Workplace Wellbeing Census, 2019.

## Tips for staying connected



### Share with your team

Encourage staff to check in each morning. They could share some information about what they plan to do today, and any successes or challenges they are facing. A simple morning routine can help people get into 'work-mode' and feel part of a work community.



### Make time

Encourage non-work chats or a 'good-news' thread. Many people have found that they have been getting to know their colleagues more personally and that an insight into everyone's home life has helped them to bond.



### Stay social

Online social events can help staff stay connected. For example, a virtual coffee or tea break, yoga, a quiz or craft sessions. Ask your team what they would like to try. Make sure to keep these work free so that people have time to relax and have a little fun with their teams.



### Create a virtual calendar

Bear in mind that different teams and team members may like different ways to socialise and keep in touch. A virtual calendar of support, information and social events with the relevant links or meeting passwords might help people plan their week and choose what to attend.



### Be kind

Misunderstandings and conflict may happen more often in teams working remotely. Workplace conflict and bullying can increase symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress related problems. Try to be sensitive and kind. Remind the team to be mindful and compassionate when having difficult conversations.

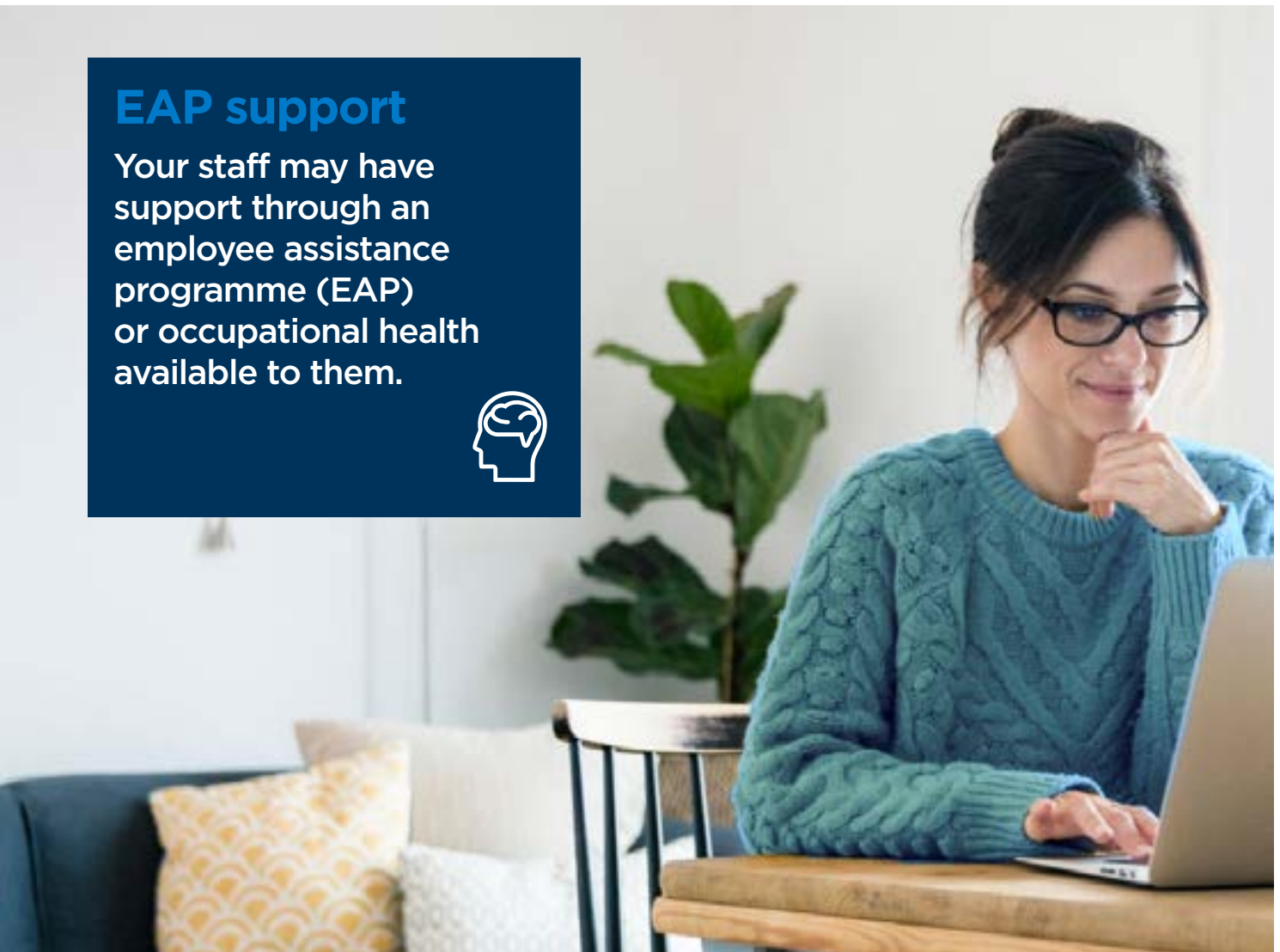


## Promoting positive mental health and wellbeing while homeworking

- Have a regular virtual team huddle. Get a sense of the mood in the team with a low-key way of sharing feelings. For example, members of the team share a number out of ten or one word that describes their mood for the day. Start off with an honest and hopefully positive word yourself if appropriate. Follow up on people who share consistently low numbers or negative words.
- Do a [simple breathing exercise](#) together before team meetings.
- Suggest team members find a space they only use for work, if possible. Being able to stand up and walk away at the end of the day can help create a distinction between work and home life. If this isn't possible, encourage them to try and work in a different room to the one in which they will spend the evening.
- If you do not already use [Wellness Action Plans](#), consider setting these up to help give structure to the support you offer staff at this time.
- Remind staff of the support they may have available to them. For example, support through Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) or occupational health. Make sure they know how to access them while working remotely.

### EAP support

Your staff may have support through an employee assistance programme (EAP) or occupational health available to them.



## Stress

This is a particularly challenging time for most people. It's important your employees manage their stress levels and ensure they're not becoming too overwhelmed. Stress can cause mental health problems or make existing problems worse. Being stressed over a long period of time can affect your physical health as well.

In some cases, staff may need to work longer hours to cover sick leave or because of additional work. This may add to their stress. Long working hours are associated with depression too. Encourage staff to take breaks and to get outside and do some exercise when they can.

Work hours may be different during lockdown - but encourage staff to stick to their planned hours and not to work outside of these times. **Lead by example.**

It's harder to recognise signs of stress in employees working remotely. Keep an eye out for changed behaviour. They may be less communicative, rush to get things done, make uncharacteristic mistakes, express high levels of worry, become agitated and fail to take breaks or participate in team meetings or social occasions.



**Work hours may be different during lockdown - but encourage staff to stick to their planned hours and not to work outside of these times. Lead by example.**

### Stress-busting checklist

- Have an ongoing dialogue with everyone in your team. Use one-to-one sessions as well as team meetings.
- Ask lots of open questions to get a sense of how employees are coping.
- Encourage online discussion of problems as well as positives. Sharing frustrations and difficulties can help, but it's harder to do remotely.
- Make sure employees feel comfortable turning off messaging software if they need to concentrate. Trust them to get on without micromanaging (which will cause more stress for you and them). Try and focus on output as a measure of success rather than time spent.
- Make sure you are accessible. Team members need to feel they can come to you if needed.

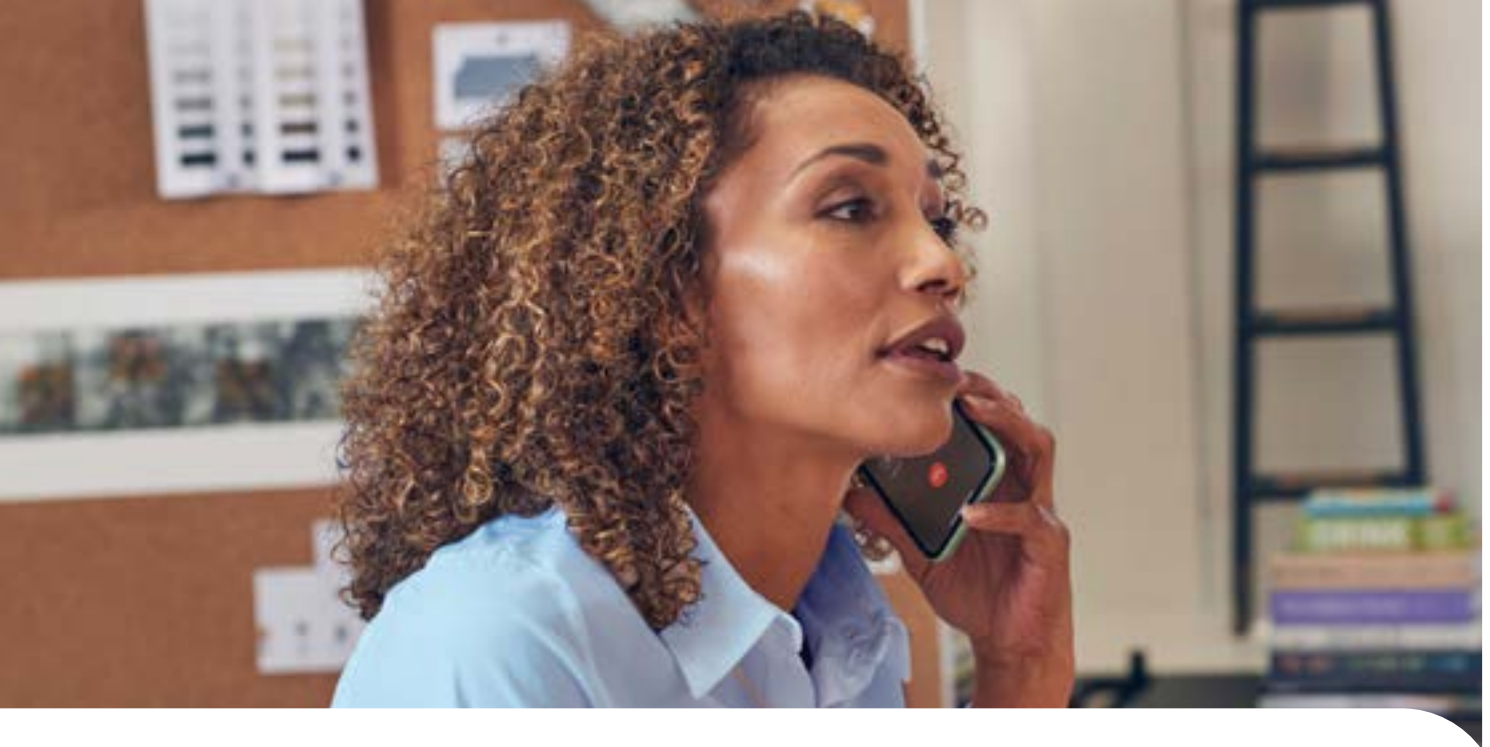
Click [here](#) for more information about work-related stress.

## Pre-existing mental health conditions and COVID-19

Below are just a few examples of how COVID-19 may be impacting your team members with existing mental health conditions. It's important to be aware of the effect these conditions may have.

- People with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) or those who have difficult feelings around hand washing and hygiene may be finding the current focus on cleanliness and hygiene difficult. The advice on regular hand washing could cause high levels of anxiety or encourage unhelpful behaviours. Some people with OCD may be going through therapy where they are actively encouraged not to wash their hands as regularly as they have been. They may be feeling conflicted and struggling with difficult feelings. [Our information on OCD](#) may help you understand and better support your team members.
- Anyone who has high levels of anxiety relating to health or death may also be struggling right now. Our information on [anxiety disorders](#) may help you understand more about what they are experiencing.
- The British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy has some information on [coping with coronavirus anxiety](#). We encourage you read this guidance so you can support your team to the best of your ability.





## Supporting furloughed staff.

Furloughing is a new concept for most of us. Some furloughed staff may appreciate the time off and chance to spend more time with family. Others may feel isolated and lonely. Furloughed staff may feel less valued or more at risk of future redundancy.

They may be feeling more anxious or experiencing low mood. Loneliness, uncertainty and job insecurity are all related to mental health problems.

- Set up a regular check in with all furloughed staff members if possible. Give them a chance to ask questions and share any concerns.
- Consider asking your CEO to do filmed updates specifically for furloughed staff members. If this isn't possible, make sure they receive general updates.
- Set up an online community or group specifically for furloughed staff - you could use an existing work tool like Slack messenger or, if furloughed staff prefer not to log in to work each day, something like Facebook.
- Invite furloughed staff to any online social events.
- Furloughed staff can still take part in training. Distance learning or training webinars may help them feel connected and useful.

**Some furloughed staff may appreciate the time off and chance to spend more time with family. Others may feel isolated and lonely.**





## Supporting vulnerable and high-risk groups.

Any one of us can catch coronavirus, but some people are at a higher risk of severe illness if they get it. It's important to understand if this applies to anyone in your team.

There are two main groups who are at an increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus: vulnerable (increased risk) and extremely vulnerable (at very high risk).

People who are vulnerable include those who are 70 and over, under 70 with an underlying health condition (see below), and people who are pregnant.

### You are considered vulnerable if you have:

- long-term (chronic) asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis
- chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
- chronic kidney disease
- chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
- chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease (MND), multiple sclerosis (MS), a learning disability or cerebral palsy
- diabetes
- problems with your spleen – for example, sickle cell disease or if you've had your spleen removed
- a weakened immune system as the result of conditions such as HIV and AIDS, or medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy
- a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above (you're extremely or seriously obese)

**If any team members are vulnerable, they should follow the social distancing rules that apply to everyone but more strictly. If they cannot follow guidance on social distancing at work, or during travel to work, they must stay at home.**

People who are classed as extremely vulnerable are those who are at 'a very high risk' of severe illness from the virus because you have a serious underlying health condition.

### **You are considered extremely vulnerable if you have:**

- received a solid organ transplant, for example, kidney, liver, pancreas, heart, and lung
- cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe COPD
- immunosuppression therapies at levels that will increase your risk of infection. These are treatments that suppress your immune system (the system of your body that fights off disease)
- significant heart disease and are pregnant
- a rare disease that significantly increases your risk of infection
- a specific cancer. This includes if you're having active chemotherapy; have lung cancer and are having radical radiotherapy; if you have a blood or bone marrow cancer; if you're having immunotherapy or antibody treatments; if you're having targeted cancer treatments; if you've had a bone marrow or stem cell transplant within the last six months or you're still taking immunosuppression medication

**Employees who are extremely vulnerable may have been advised to shield themselves completely for 12 weeks. They can register online for extra support – for example, groceries or medicine delivered to their home.**

It's particularly important to make sure you stay in touch with vulnerable or high-risk employees, whether they are working or not. It is likely to be a very anxious time for them and their family. Think about what you and your colleagues could do to offer extra support.

- Ask them if you or your team members can support with shopping.
- Stay in contact regularly, particularly if they live alone. A phone call as well as online communication may be appreciated. Make sure they are up to speed on all of the latest work developments.
- Invite them to online social events and team meetings, even if they are not working.

We have more information on [vulnerable and extremely vulnerable groups](#).





# Ten team support tips.



## 1 Look after yourself

Right now, personal health and wellbeing are more important than ever. Your team will look to you for reassurance and guidance, so try and lead by example and make time to take care of yourself. That way, you'll be able to support them and your business better.



## 2 Champion their wellbeing

In tough times reinforce to your team that looking after their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing is more important than anything else.

## 3 Lead with compassion

Be mindful that the current situation is affecting everyone differently and some of your team members may need extra support. Are your team lonely or feeling anxious or out of the loop? Is something late? Did someone miss a meeting? They could be struggling with childcare or an ill relative. Always try and be sensitive to their situation and **show kindness.**



## 4 Be clear on support available

Remind your team what's available. Things like an employee assistance programme (EAP) or occupational health support they can access remotely. Don't have either? Why not **create your own wellness action plan** to structure your support.

## 5 Managing any existing health issues

Existing mental health problems and muscle, bone and joint issues may all be exacerbated by the current situation. Be aware of these conditions and ensure you ask your team how you can help.

## 6 Watch out for burnout

The suddenly blurred lines between our professional and personal lives can mean longer working hours and more chance of your team being rundown. Watch out for the key signs: stress, fatigue and reduced performance. Make sure you review workload and assignments regularly to avoid placing employees under undue pressure.

## 7 Introduce wellbeing breaks

These could be virtual coffee breaks with colleagues, going for a walk or just time spent with kids.



## 8 Stay connected

Working from home can be isolating and lonely, especially for those living alone. Keeping in touch with colleagues regularly can have a positive impact on their overall wellbeing. From daily check ins to Friday quizzes, keeping connected is more important than ever.

## 9 Be mindful of vulnerable colleagues

Look out for those who are classed as vulnerable or extremely vulnerable. Think about ways you can support them, such as adjusting their working hours. Encourage open conversations with your team, so they can share their concerns and additional needs with you.



## 10 Keep up to date

Your team are individuals with different needs. One size doesn't fit all, and now more than ever you should try and take a tailored approach to looking after their wellbeing. Remember this when communicating with your team and make sure you note each person's situation and requirements.

# Resources.

## Further information

Explore the links below for further advice and support.

### **Bupa Workplace Wellbeing Hub**

[bupa.co.uk/business/workplace-wellbeing-hub](https://bupa.co.uk/business/workplace-wellbeing-hub)

### **Bupa Workplace Mental Health Hub**

[bupa.co.uk/workplace-mental-health](https://bupa.co.uk/workplace-mental-health)

### **Bupa Coronavirus Information Hub**

[bupa.co.uk/coronavirus](https://bupa.co.uk/coronavirus)

## Sources

**Public Health England. COVID-19: guidance for employees, employers and businesses.**

[www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk), accessed May 2020

**Public Health England. Coronavirus (COVID-19): what you need to do.**

[www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk), accessed May 2020

**CIPD. Responding to the coronavirus.**

[www.cipd.co.uk](https://www.cipd.co.uk), last reviewed May 2020

**CIPD. COVID-19 workforce planner.**

[www.cipd.co.uk](https://www.cipd.co.uk), April 2020

**CIPD. Preparing your organisation for homeworking.**

[www.cipd.co.uk](https://www.cipd.co.uk), April 2020

**ACAS. Coronavirus (COVID-19): advice for employers and employees.**

[www.acas.org.uk](https://www.acas.org.uk), accessed April 2020

**British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.**

[www.bacp.co.uk](https://www.bacp.co.uk), published February 2020

**Mind Survey of 1,000 employees, 2018.**

[www.mind.org.uk/news/campaigns/news/half-of-workers-have-experienced-poor-mental-health-in-current-job/](https://www.mind.org.uk/news/campaigns/news/half-of-workers-have-experienced-poor-mental-health-in-current-job/)



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