

Blog

The Housing Quality Network

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Coronavirus (COVID-19): Tips to manage homeworking

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There's no doubt COVID-19 is creating disruption for workplaces. But it also creates an opportunity to explore new ways of working and test organisational resilience. Here are some tips for managers who are managing team members working from home.

- Be aware of coronavirus symptoms so you can help team members to spot it quickly. The symptoms are similar to other illnesses that are much more common, such as cold and flu:
 - A cough
 - A high temperature
 - Shortness of breath.

(Having these symptoms does not necessarily mean people have the illness.)

- Communicate regularly about the virus and your organisation's response to it. Are there any homeworking policies in place? If so, explain them clearly and how they'll work during this period
- Clarify and re-clarify goals – who needs to do what and by when. Priorities may need to be changed and revised frequently as circumstances change. Confirm things in writing so that you both have something to refer back to
- Emphasise personal interactions and keep everyone in the team in mind
- Schedule regular check-ins and meetings using the technology you have available. Set some time aside for personal updates that'd normally take place in a face-to-face meeting
- Don't rely on email for all communications. It loses the personal touch. Instead call team members. Use video conferencing or FaceTime them, as well as WhatsApp. Have a back-up plan in place if your preferred option breaks down

- Familiarise yourself with individuals' work areas. Perhaps you could do a virtual tour of their workspace so you can understand and be sensitive to any potential distractions and help them to make the best use of their workstation? Avoid making assumptions about a team member's focus and commitment. Try to think about their outputs and delivery of goals
- Familiarise yourself with individuals' households and domestic situations – eg, do they live alone, with dependents or with older people? Bear in mind that people may feel a greater sense of isolation if they've little or no contact with people inside or outside their home – or have higher levels of concern if living with older more vulnerable people.

Tips for team members working from home:

- Keep a regular schedule for your day. This provides not only structure but can keep you motivated too. Get up as early as you normally would. Get dressed and get started. Do allow yourself some down time though. Take a lunch break and get some fresh air. This will help to keep you productive for the whole day
- Have clear boundaries. It can be easy to let work and home blur into one when you work from home. Try to set aside a space at home where you can work away from interruptions. At the end of the day, tidy your work away so it's not a constant reminder of what you've got left to do
- Take regular breaks. Working from home can often be intense because there are no colleagues around to provide the occasional distraction. Allow yourself regular breaks from your screen when you can make yourself a drink or ring a colleague
- Stay connected. Working from home for long periods of time can lead to a sense of isolation so make the extra effort to stay connected with your manager and colleagues. If your organisation has video conferencing facilities, now is a good time to use them more effectively. You might not be able to get into the office, but you can keep yourself and your work achievements visible.