

Mental Health and Social Distancing

Employers have a duty of care for their employees' health and safety and that extends beyond the physical considerations. We have seen many companies tailor their H&S policies to include statements regarding mental health and workplace stress and to go as far as to have mental first aiders in the workplace in recent years.



But when many employees are working remotely, how does that work now? And arguably during one of the most unsettling times known to all five generations in the current workforce? What can and should employers be doing to ensure the wellbeing of their employees?

Here are some tips from HR Now.

As always, the key message here is communicate, communicate, communicate!

- Wherever possible, check in with your employees on a regular basis. Team meetings can be held by video conference and these can really help people to feel less isolated. Although you should be aware that this may be uncomfortable for some people - the reality of your manager and / or colleagues seeing inside your home may cause feelings of anxiety for some. As far as possible, replicate any interaction that happened in the usual workplace in the virtual workplace.
- Understand that many employees who are working from home will also have other obligations to undertake at home, such as home schooling or looking after another dependent and try to be flexible. If there is regular contact, as discussed above, it should be clear to all parties how everyone is working.
- Encourage employees who are working from home to take breaks in the same way they would if they were in the office.
- Ideas of ways to stay both physically and mentally active are; eating healthy, drinking plenty of water and having regular exercise.
- Keeping windows open to let in fresh air and get natural sunlight as much as possible. Those with gardens should try use them and if social distancing principles are followed, going for a walk is a great way to cover many of the elements on this list.

If you have an employee assistance programme available to your employees, check with your provider to see if they have any additional resources online that are specific to the current situation and share these with your employees. Also ask your provider if there are any disruptions or changes to the services on offer and let your employees know.

We understand that the unprecedented measures we are facing provide challenges for everyone - as much as this is new for employees, it is also new for line managers and business owners, so you need to look after your own mental health and emotional wellbeing as well. Ensure you have a virtual community with whom you can connect and balance this with the need to take time to switch off from the news and your work – finding new ways to maintain social interaction will help you through this situation.

For further information on work from home and / or well-being policies, please get in touch.

