

# Employee Wellbeing during the Covid-19 Pandemic factsheet



## Introduction

Our lives have been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and many of your employees will be rapidly adjusting to new norms, including in many cases, homeworking for the first time or on a sustained and potentially long term basis.

Understanding employee wellbeing and supporting your workforce at this challenging time can help you to respond more effectively to employees' needs, allowing them to cope better with the pressures of change.

This factsheet provides details of the latest thinking in employee wellbeing as well as ideas for how smaller social sector employers can support the health and wellbeing of their workforce at this time.

## What is wellbeing?

The term wellbeing covers many aspects of the way people feel about their lives, their physical, mental, emotional and social health including relationships with the people around them, their own character and their home and social life. Our wellbeing can be influenced by a number of factors including job stress, concern regarding job security, sleep disturbance, nutrition and exercise, financial concerns and personal relationships.

Employee wellbeing is key to all organisations; the positive outcomes from investing in employee wellbeing include increased workforce resilience, greater innovation and higher productivity.

## Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

The impact of the current pandemic can be seen across the globe with almost half the world in lockdown. This unprecedented situation has resulted in employees having to adapt to homeworking (where possible), balance homeworking with caring responsibilities and deal with worries and concerns that may not have existed prior to this pandemic including fear of infection, concerns regarding employment, finances and potentially dealing with loss and grief.

The speed of change we have experienced and the uncertainty regarding the future can have an impact on our emotional and physical resilience, pulling us away from our state of wellbeing.

## What can organisations do support employees to maintain their wellbeing at this time?

There is no “one size fits all” as your approach will be best determined by considering the unique needs and characteristics of your organisation, workforce and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the workforce.

To help guide you in your thinking for your organisation, we have set out below some tips to help employees maintain their wellbeing; whilst it may not be practical for your organisation to implement all of them, just taking a few steps is likely to have a positive impact on your workforce.

### Tips to maintain wellbeing

#### **Respond quickly and positively to employees saying that they are stressed**

Stress is one of the biggest causes of poor mental health in the workplace. A supportive ear plus small changes to the workload, working hours or location can make a world of difference to a colleague who tells you they are feeling stressed. Let employees tell you what would help and implement it if you possibly can. If you have concerns about the stress levels of an employee, you should carry out a stress risk assessment to help identify sources of stress and implement support mechanisms.

#### **Promote your Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)**

EAPs are a confidential source of support to help employees deal with personal problems that might negatively impact on their performance, health and wellbeing. Remind employees that they can access this support.

If you don't currently have an EAP, they can be purchased from as little as £100 per year for your whole organisation. Contact us for an introduction to our preferred supplier.

#### **Encourage mindfulness**

Mindfulness is a process whereby the individual seeks to be fully present in the moment, which can help to decrease stress levels. Professor Mark Williams<sup>1</sup> states that mindfulness can help us to become more aware of the stream of thoughts and the feelings they evoke in us. In a time of crisis, we can become entangled in a constant stream of thoughts in ways that are not helpful.

You could share links to mindfulness tools with your employees should they wish to practice this technique.

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<sup>1</sup> NHS Guidance – “Mindfulness” published in November 2018

### **Check-in with your teams**

With many of us now working from home, whilst we may feel that our teams are still connected as we are still delivering services, the social cohesion of the team may have diminished. Our social connections with colleagues are still important, for some who may be isolated at home this may particularly be the case, so think of ways that these can be maintained. Technology and apps like Zoom are particularly helpful and could enable you to have team lunches, birthday catch ups, quiz nights etc.

In addition to encouraging social interactions, ensure that you ask employees how they are coping at this time and share your own experiences; people may feel more inclined to open up about their own experiences if you share yours.

### **Encourage healthy work habits**

Working from home can blur boundaries between work and home life. Encourage your employees to set and maintain a regular schedule of their working hours and encourage them to take regular breaks.

Remember that the employer's duty of care continues and that the employer's responsibility for the working environment, and the employee's health and safety within it, extends to the home environment. As a minimum, you should carry out workstation / Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessments for homeworkers. , These can be done simply through the employee completing a self-assessment which is reviewed with their line manager. Contact us to request our self-administered Homeworking Risk Assessment.

### **Encourage employees to be active**

Encourage employees to get up and move around where possible. You could share links to desk-based stretches and exercises which may be particularly beneficial where employees may be working with desks and chairs whose intended purpose is not to be a workstation.

Encourage employees to get exercise, in accordance with government guidance.

### **Promote healthy eating**

Support employees to eat healthily in order to help improve their wellbeing. Simple ideas include encouraging colleagues to drink more water and eat healthily.

### **Resources – a curated selection of online resources to help maintain wellbeing and / or offering practical support**

**Mental Health Foundation** – Support and guidance on mental health, including during the Coronavirus pandemic.

**MIND resources for managers** – Guidance for line managers to enable them to support their staff, this includes advice, toolkits and practical resources

**Calm** – An app offering free and paid for access to resources to reduce stress, increase mindfulness at this time.

**Living Life to the Full** – Free online courses covering low mood, stress and resilience which cover topics such as practical problem solving, confidence building and staying calm.

**Headspace** - Free guided meditations to help employers and employees through the stress and anxiety of COVID-19.

**Joe Wickes** – Offering free daily workouts on his You Tube channel

**NHS (sleep)** – Guidance to improve sleep habits

**Sitting exercises - NHS** – A mixture of upper and lower body exercises that can be done whilst seated to help prevent injury and maintain your physical fitness from your office chair.

**Age UK** – Guidance on supporting older people at this time.

**Cruse** – Bereavement and grief counselling in times of loss.

### **Record keeping**

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) applies to personal data. Managers should be aware that documents, notebooks, emails etc. that contain notes from meetings with team members about their wellbeing may contain personal data, including special category data. Such data should be processed and stored in compliance with your organisation's Data Protection Policy, which may need updating to reflect the altered circumstances of homeworking.

### **Specialist advice from Roots HR**

Roots HR can assist with stress and DSE risk assessments, provide contractual and operational guidance on homeworking, rest breaks and annual leave, advise on employee relations matters, develop homeworking and absence policies and provide further information about Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs).

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