Teleworking during the coronavirus: Tips for coping

If your office is closed due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, you might be working from home for the first time. While teleworking can offer many benefits, teleworking during the pandemic poses unique challenges. Consider these tips for maintaining work-life balance and avoiding professional isolation while social distancing.

Pros and cons of teleworking

Before the pandemic, research suggested that teleworking can increase employees' job satisfaction and commitment to an organization and even slightly improve their performance at work. Teleworking can also reduce exhaustion and work-related stress, possibly due to a reduced commute or more-flexible hours. Other benefits include a reduction in commuting costs and more freedom to work independently.

However, teleworking has always had drawbacks, including social and professional isolation, decreased information sharing opportunities, and difficulty separating work and personal time. The lack of a physical separation between these two worlds can cause family obligations to intrude on work and work obligations to bleed into family time. This can cause teleworkers to work extra hours to prove themselves, resulting in burnout. The ability to be constantly connected to work through a variety of technologies also can cause employees to feel like they are always on or unable to unplug at the end of the day.

Teleworking due to the coronavirus

Teleworking during the pandemic brings extra challenges.

Those new to working from home likely aren't used to being isolated from co-workers and might not have a home office or area conducive to doing work. With other family members also potentially at home, including children or a partner, avoiding distractions and interruptions might be next to impossible. To find privacy, employees could find themselves in the awkward position of conducting meetings from their bedrooms or kitchens. And getting virtual meeting technology to work properly isn't always easy. These changes can cause anxiety, stress and frustration.

Preventing professional isolation while teleworking

For those new to teleworking, the biggest challenge of working from home during the pandemic might be the lack of in-person collaboration with colleagues. Teleworkers don't get to see their managers, staff or team members in the hallway or at the watercooler. As a result, regular contact through email, phone calls and virtual meetings is crucial. You might make time at the start of meetings specifically for small talk to give people time to interact.

Managers might consider having a regular five-minute check-in with each staff member, even if there is no pressing business to discuss. For colleagues, consider scheduling virtual lunch and coffee meetings to catch up on each other's projects and maintain your relationships. Online communication platforms also can help keep you connected throughout the day.

Teleworking and work-life balance during the coronavirus

The key to work-life balance as a teleworker is being able to set boundaries — both for your work and personal obligations. To get started:

- **Develop a routine.** Come up with rituals that help you define the beginning and end of your workday. For example, make your bed and get dressed each morning as if you were going into the office. When you're done working each day, change your outfit, take a drive or walk — in place of your normal commute — or do an activity with your kids. Starting and stopping work at around the same time each day might help, too.
- **Exercise your willpower.** Take care of yourself by eating healthy and working out. Resisting the temptation to do otherwise will help you when you need the discipline to set boundaries for your work and personal life.
- **Talk to your manager.** Discuss your manager's expectations for your availability and the obstacles you might be facing at home. Ask what time of day is acceptable for you to stop checking your work emails or responding to work requests. Or agree on an alternative schedule with flexibility that allows you to spend some time caring for your kids during the day and make up hours at other times.
- **Talk to your family.** If you are working from home due to the pandemic and also have family at home, try to establish guidelines regarding interruptions. If your children are young, you'll likely need to regularly talk to them about when you are working and can't play, as well as come up with activities or temporary distractions for them. If there is more than one caregiver at home, you might take turns caring for the kids. You might also remind family and friends what times of day you can and can't talk or text.
- **Think before you press send.** Working from home might mean emailing, messaging or texting every time you want to talk to a co-worker. Reduce the burden on your colleagues by making it clear when a request is urgent or important. If you're in a leadership role, consider how sending late-night emails might affect your employees' ability to unwind and enjoy time away from work.
- **Prioritize your work.** Focus on your most important work right now. Working all of the time isn't good for you — or your family.

Working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic requires patience, creativity and persistence. Keep experimenting to figure out what works best for you during this uncertain period.

Save the bumblebees

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COVID-19 and your mental health

The COVID-19 pandemic has likely brought many changes to how you live your life, and with it uncertainty, altered daily routines, financial pressures and social isolation. You may worry about getting sick, how long the pandemic will last and what the future will bring. Information overload, rumors and misinformation can make your life feel out of control and make it unclear what to do.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, you may experience stress, anxiety, fear, sadness and loneliness. And mental health disorders, including anxiety and depression, can worsen.

Learn self-care strategies and get the care you need to help you cope.

Self-care strategies

Self-care strategies are good for your mental and physical health and can help you take charge of your life. Take care of your body and your mind and connect with others to benefit your mental health.

Take care of your body

Be mindful about your physical health:

- **Get enough sleep.** Go to bed and get up at the same times each day. Stick close to your typical schedule, even if you're staying at home.
- **Participate in regular physical activity.** Regular physical activity and exercise can help reduce anxiety and improve mood. Find an activity that includes movement, such as dance or exercise apps. Get outside in an area that makes it easy to maintain distance from people — as recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) or your government — such as a nature trail or your own backyard.
- **Eat healthy.** Choose a well-balanced diet. Avoid loading up on junk food and refined sugar. Limit caffeine as it can aggravate stress and anxiety.
- **Avoid tobacco, alcohol and drugs.** If you smoke tobacco or if you vape, you're already at higher risk of lung disease. Because COVID-19 affects the lungs, your risk increases even more. Using alcohol to try to cope can make matters worse and reduce your coping skills. Avoid taking drugs to cope, unless your doctor prescribed medications for you.
- **Limit screen time.** Turn off electronic devices for some time each day, including 30 minutes before bedtime. Make a conscious effort to spend less time in front of a screen — television, tablet, computer and phone.
- **Relax and recharge.** Set aside time for yourself. Even a few minutes of quiet time can be refreshing and help to quiet your mind and reduce anxiety. Many people benefit from practices

such as deep breathing, tai chi, yoga or meditation. Soak in a bubble bath, listen to music, or read or listen to a book — whatever helps you relax. Select a technique that works for you and practice it regularly.

Take care of your mind

Reduce stress triggers:

- **Keep your regular routine.** Maintaining a regular schedule is important to your mental health. In addition to sticking to a regular bedtime routine, keep consistent times for meals, bathing and getting dressed, work or study schedules, and exercise. Also set aside time for activities you enjoy. This predictability can make you feel more in control.
- **Limit exposure to news media.** Constant news about COVID-19 from all types of media can heighten fears about the disease. Limit social media that may expose you to rumors and false information. Also limit reading, hearing or watching other news, but keep up to date on national and local recommendations. Look for reliable sources such as the CDC and WHO.
- **Stay busy.** A distraction can get you away from the cycle of negative thoughts that feed anxiety and depression. Enjoy hobbies that you can do at home, identify a new project or clean out that closet you promised you'd get to. Doing something positive to manage anxiety is a healthy coping strategy.
- **Focus on positive thoughts.** Choose to focus on the positive things in your life, instead of dwelling on how bad you feel. Consider starting each day by listing things you are thankful for. Maintain a sense of hope, work to accept changes as they occur and try to keep problems in perspective.
- **Use your moral compass or spiritual life for support.** If you draw strength from a belief system, it can bring you comfort during difficult times.
- **Set priorities.** Don't become overwhelmed by creating a life-changing list of things to achieve while you're home. Set reasonable goals each day and outline steps you can take to reach those goals. Give yourself credit for every step in the right direction, no matter how small. And recognize that some days will be better than others.

Connect with others

Build support and strengthen relationships:

- **Make connections.** If you need to stay at home and distance yourself from others, avoid social isolation. Find time each day to make virtual connections by email, texts, phone, or FaceTime or similar apps. If you're working remotely from home, ask your co-workers how they're doing and share coping tips. Enjoy virtual socializing and talking to those in your home.

- **Do something for others.** Find purpose in helping the people around you. For example, email, text or call to check on your friends, family members and neighbors — especially those who are elderly. If you know someone who can't get out, ask if there's something needed, such as groceries or a prescription picked up, for instance. But be sure to follow CDC, WHO and your government recommendations on social distancing and group meetings.
- **Support a family member or friend.** If a family member or friend needs to be isolated for safety reasons or gets sick and needs to be quarantined at home or in the hospital, come up with ways to stay in contact. This could be through electronic devices or the telephone or by sending a note to brighten the day, for example.

Recognizing what's typical and what's not

Stress is a normal psychological and physical reaction to the demands of life. Everyone reacts differently to difficult situations, and it's normal to feel stress and worry during a crisis. But multiple challenges daily, such as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, can push you beyond your ability to cope.

Many people may have mental health concerns, such as symptoms of anxiety and depression during this time. And feelings may change over time.

Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling helpless, sad, angry, irritable, hopeless, anxious or afraid. You may have trouble concentrating on typical tasks, changes in appetite, body aches and pains, or difficulty sleeping or you may struggle to face routine chores.

When these signs and symptoms last for several days in a row, make you miserable and cause problems in your daily life so that you find it hard to carry out normal responsibilities, it's time to ask for help.

Get help when you need it

Hoping mental health problems such as anxiety or depression will go away on their own can lead to worsening symptoms. If you have concerns or if you experience worsening of mental health symptoms, ask for help when you need it, and be upfront about how you're doing. To get help you may want to:

- Call or use social media to contact a close friend or loved one — even though it may be hard to talk about your feelings.
- Contact a minister, spiritual leader or someone in your faith community.
- Contact your employee assistance program, if your employer has one, and get counseling or ask for a referral to a mental health professional.

- Call your primary care provider or mental health professional to ask about appointment options to talk about your anxiety or depression and get advice and guidance. Some may provide the option of phone, video or online appointments.
- Contact organizations such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for help and guidance.

If you're feeling suicidal or thinking of hurting yourself, seek help. Contact your primary care provider or a mental health professional. Or call a suicide hotline. In the U.S., call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) or use its webchat at suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat.

Continue your self-care strategies

You can expect your current strong feelings to fade when the pandemic is over, but stress won't disappear from your life when the health crisis of COVID-19 ends. Continue these self-care practices to take care of your mental health and increase your ability to cope with life's ongoing challenges.

Save the bumblebees

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COVID-19 pandemic: Coping with effects of unemployment

Millions of people around the world are coping with job loss caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Whether it's temporary or permanent, unemployment can lead to stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health challenges. Uncertainty related to the COVID-19 pandemic only adds to the angst.

If the COVID-19 pandemic has left you jobless, you may be experiencing many emotions and troubling thoughts. For example, you may feel:

- A loss of identity and sense of purpose
- Unappreciated, and you may no longer feel essential
- Angry, scared and jealous of others who can still work
- Lost, as if you don't know what to do next
- Worried about how you'll take care of yourself and your family and provide for basic needs

Not everyone will have these feelings, but even those coping well with unemployment may experience some of them sometimes.

The first step in coping with the mental and emotional effects of unemployment is accepting that your feelings are normal. From there, try these steps to manage your thoughts and emotions.

Accept your feelings

Remember that you're human. This means you have a brain that's hard-wired to look for threats. When your brain spots a threat, such as unemployment, it sends signals throughout your body to gather resources to address it. This is known as the fight-or-flight response. Among other reactions, this response causes your pulse and breathing to quicken and your muscles to tense up.

When your brain kicks into high gear, take a deep breath. Step back for a moment. Accept that what you're feeling is normal. Give yourself credit for doing the best you can under the circumstances.

Acknowledge your grief

If you've lost your job permanently or temporarily, grief is one of the most significant emotions you may feel. You may already know the stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, withdrawal and acceptance. You may experience stages of grief in the same way you would the death of someone you love. Address feelings of grief as you would with any other loss.

Among other losses, you may grieve activities at your job that bring meaning and purpose to your life. You may grieve career accomplishments you feel proud of, and feeling a sense of belonging and identity. You may also grieve a loss of relationships with co-workers and structure to your day.

Maintain perspective

Try to keep in mind that the COVID-19 pandemic is causing many companies around the world to make difficult decisions. Keep in mind that staffing decisions are related to the COVID-19 pandemic, not your worth.

Seek out resources

If you're having trouble providing basic needs for yourself or your family and you need unemployment help, you can turn to community resources for assistance. Getting help with basic needs, such as food and shelter, can reduce the stress of unemployment.

For example, local, state or government resources, such as food banks, may be available to help with meeting basic needs. In addition, in the United States, you may be able to get affordable health insurance through HealthCare.gov if you've lost your health insurance coverage. Unemployment help may also be available. In the United States, you may also be able to receive pandemic unemployment assistance if you can't work because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Assume the best in others

Life during the COVID-19 pandemic can cause anxiety levels to rise for many people. This can lead to feelings of dread, sadness and hopelessness. If you're struggling, others around you may be, too.

These feelings may cause people to say and do things you don't understand. When this happens, aim to assume the best in others. Try to have compassion, knowing that, like you, others are likely doing their best to manage their feelings in a time of crisis.

Use your energy wisely

What makes you feel energized or drains your energy? Try to do more of the things that boost your energy. For example, avoid being hard on yourself or focusing on your losses. Instead, be kind to yourself and find reasons to laugh.

And just as you would if you were working, try to conserve your energy. For example, build breaks into your day instead of spending every moment searching for work. These breaks can also help you focus less on worries about the future.

Focus on the present moment

Try to bring your thoughts to the present. Focus on what you can control at this moment, rather than on concerns over your future. Focus on your breathing, what you hear or what you see. If you're moving your body, think about how it feels to swing your arms, for example. If your mind wanders to worries about your job or finances, try to gently guide it back to the things you have control over in the moment.

Focusing your attention in these ways can help free your mind of thoughts causing feelings of stress and anxiety.

Find your value

If you connect your sense of self-worth to your work, look for new ways to realize the contributions you make to the world around you. You may try making lists about yourself, such as:

- What you're good at
- What you care about
- What you know
- What you can count on within yourself

This can help you remember you always have these qualities, whether you're working or not.

Take care of yourself

If you're unemployed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, remember that while you can't control what happens to you, you can control how you respond. Try these strategies to take care of your mental and emotional health as you navigate the days ahead.

Save the bumblebees

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Coronavirus grief: Coping with the loss of routine during the pandemic

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has changed people's lives in many ways. In addition to feeling grief over the loss of life caused by COVID-19, you're likely grieving the loss of your normal routine.

Understanding grief caused by the coronavirus pandemic

Stay-at-home restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have affected people's jobs, the way kids go to school and play, and the ability to gather in person with family and friends. These measures have also changed how people shop, worship, exercise, eat and seek entertainment. As a result, the pandemic has had a major psychological impact, causing people to lose a sense of safety, predictability, control, freedom and security.

Why is the loss of your routine so upsetting? You might not realize it, but you don't only feel attachments to other people. You also probably feel powerful attachments to your work and certain places and things. The experience of losing these attachments, however, isn't as well-defined as some losses. And unexpected endings can cause strong emotions. This can make it hard to deal with what's happened and move forward.

You might also find that changes brought on by the pandemic are affecting your sense of self. For instance, if your identity is closely tied to your job, losing your job could trigger an identity crisis.

Signs and symptoms of grief

Grief might cause you to feel numb or empty, angry, or unable to feel joy or sadness. You might also have physical symptoms, such as trouble sleeping or eating, excess fatigue, muscle weakness, or shakiness. You might have nightmares or socially withdraw.

Keep in mind, however, that grief can also have some positive effects. For example, you might feel grateful for brave and caring people in your community. You might have an increased appreciation for your relationships and have a desire to help others who are experiencing similar losses.

Coping with coronavirus grief

As awful as it might feel, grief serves an important purpose. Grief helps you recognize that you've experienced a loss and that you're going to need to adapt.

To deal with your grief:

- **Pay attention to your feelings.** Name what you've lost due to the pandemic. It might help to write this down in a journal. Allow yourself to feel sadness or cry.

- **Think about your strengths and coping skills.** How can they help you move forward? Consider other tough transitions you've been through, such as a previous job change or divorce. What did you do that helped you recover?
- **Stay connected.** Don't let social distancing prevent you from getting the support you need. Use phone calls, text messages, video chats and social media to stay in touch with family and friends who are positive and supportive. Reach out to those in similar situations. Pets also can provide emotional support.
- **Create an adapted routine.** This can help preserve a sense of order and purpose, despite how much things may have changed. In addition to work or online learning, include activities that might help you cope, such as exercise, worship or hobbies. Keep a regular sleep schedule and try to maintain a healthy diet.
- **Limit your news diet.** Spending too much time reading or listening to news about the COVID-19 pandemic can cause you to focus heavily on what you've lost, as well as increase anxiety.
- **Remember the journey.** If you've lost your job, you don't have to let the way it ended define the whole experience. Consider some of your good memories and the big picture.

As you adjust to a new reality and focus on the things you can control, your feelings of grief are likely to lessen.

If you're having trouble coping with your grief over changes caused by the pandemic, consider seeking help from a mental health provider.

Save the bumblebees

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