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# SUPPORTING WORKING PARENTS IN THE TRANSITION TO WORKING FROM HOME WITH KIDS AND PARTNERS THROUGH COVID-19

**The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a major shift in how many Australians work for the foreseeable future. The Government has asked employees to work from home where possible, and for many organisations this is entirely new. Not long ago, only one in three Australians regularly worked from home.
(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016)**

As we all navigate this 'new normal', it is important to recognise that, for many employees and leaders, this also means adapting to working from home with others. Leaders need to plan for how they will lead and support team members working remotely, particularly those with the additional pressures of childcare, home learning, and other family members in the home.

In this resource sheet we discuss the nature of transitioning in COVID-19 and five practical strategies for leading and supporting employees who are working from home with others. We also provide resources for managing the mental health and wellbeing of yourself and your team during this period of uncertainty.

> At this time of unprecedented change, one of the significant transitions impacting Australian workplaces is the increase in those working remotely. Some organisations have asked all their people to work from home, and some are juggling a workforce that is half-home and half at the coalface. While this transition brings both challenges and opportunities, it is important to acknowledge that many working parents now also find themselves unexpectedly adjusting to the change alongside children, partners and pets!

DR SARAH COTTON / CO-DIRECTOR, ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST / TRANSITIONING WELL

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It's common to feel unsettled and uneasy as both you and your employees navigate the changes occurring in the world, and in your homes.

**For more information:**

https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov. au/doc/work-related-psychological- health-and-safety-systematic-approach- meeting-your-duties

# What are work-related risk factors and how will this resource help?

**Work-related factors, also known as psychosocial hazards, refers to anything in the management or design of work that increases the risk of work-related stress.**

This can lead to physical injury, mental injury or both at the same time.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, working parents faced challenges integrating work and family lives. In a recent study of Australian working parents, one-third reported feeling worried and anxious, while 62% reported that looking after personal and mental wellbeing was one of their most pressing challenges (Source: National Working Parent survey 2019).

Supporting working parents through the transition to working from home is therefore critical in helping to reduce possible work-related factors such as:

- Low job control.
- High and low job demands.
- Poor support.
- Poor organisational change management.
- Poor organisational justice.
- Low recognition and reward.
- Low role clarity.
- Poor workplace relationships.
- Poor environmental conditions.
- Remote and isolated work.
- Violent or traumatic events.

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To read more about the psychology of transition, we recommend Nancy Schlossberg's book: "Overwhelmed: Coping with Life's Ups and Downs"

## The Nature of Transition

Before considering how to lead and support employees navigating the transition to working from home with kids and/or partners, it's useful to first consider the difference between transition and change in line with Schlossberg's Transition Model.

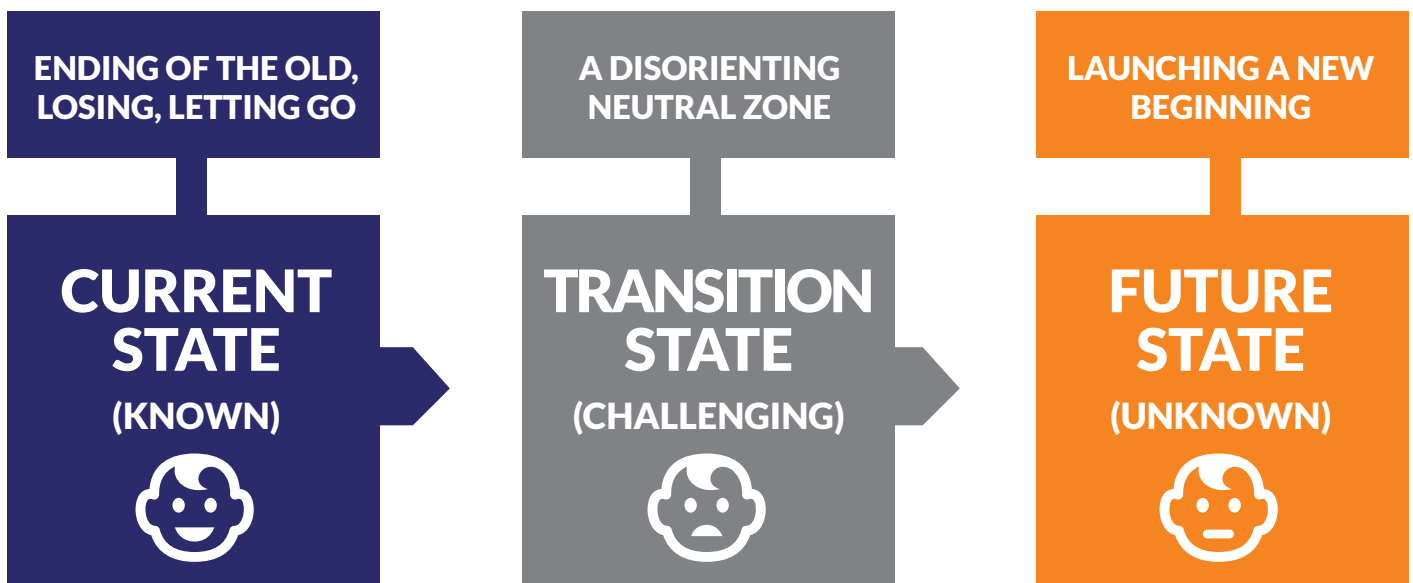### WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHANGE AND TRANSITION?

**Change** is what happens to us, i.e. COVID-19, work changes, kids home from school during the day. As a result of the changes, we might have:

1. Different **roles**, e.g. home education.

2. Different **routines**, e.g. no more commute.

3. Different **relationships**, e.g. being 24/7 partners and 'co-workers'.

4. Different **assumptions**, e.g. what we expected for 2020.

If the significance of a transition can be measured by the extent of change in the four areas listed above—it's no wonder that many of us may be feeling a bit disoriented.

**Transition** is the process we each go through, as individuals and organisations, to adapt to the changes—in other words, moving from what is known ('old normal'), to what is unknown ('new normal').

It's common to feel unsettled and uneasy as both you and your employees navigate the changes occurring in the world, and in your homes. We all need to go through a transition period to find our 'new normal', and this is often uncomfortable and challenging.

| ENDING OF THE OLD, LOSING, LETTING GO | A DISORIENTING NEUTRAL ZONE | LAUNCHING A NEW BEGINNING |
|---|---|---|
| **CURRENT STATE** (KNOWN) | **TRANSITION STATE** (CHALLENGING) | **FUTURE STATE** (UNKNOWN) |

Source: Adapted from Bridges (2003) and Change Management Learning Centre (2012)

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How leaders communicate and lead at this time is likely to significantly impact employees during this unsettling time. It's so important as a leader to talk to your people, understand their unique circumstances and together, see what works.

We'll all be trying new things—some will be successful, others won't. What's crucial is that leaders keep checking in with their people, listening to what their changing needs are, and adapting to suit them as required.

JUSTINE ALTER /
CO-DIRECTOR, PSYCHOLOGIST /
TRANSITIONING WELL

## WHAT ARE THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES OF THIS TRANSITION?

**While we may all be undergoing some form of transition, none of our situations are the same.**
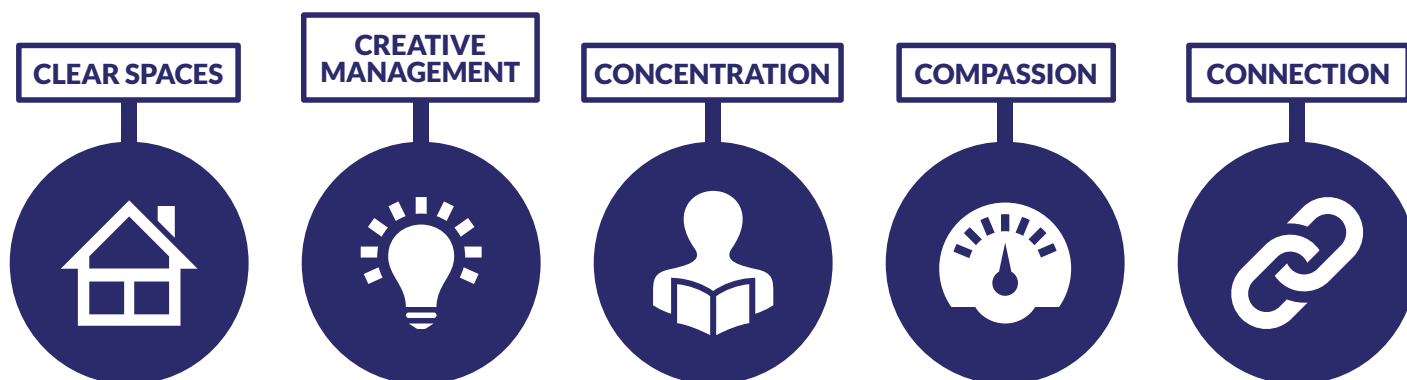
All leaders and employees will have different strengths and experiences, so our personal transition will be unique. However, the COVID-19 pandemic presents a number of additional challenges to the transition process, including:

- **Multiple transitions**
  For most, there have been a lot of life changes in a short space of time. Working from home and leading remotely are just some aspects of this, and the more change, the more disruption.

- **Forced upon us**
  Transition can be easier when we feel we have some choice and control, or if the change is in a preferred direction. We didn't choose this. And for some, working from home (particularly with others), and/or leading a team remotely is not ideal.

- **High levels of uncertainty**
  The environment is rapidly evolving with no clear end in sight. The bridge between our 'old normal' and 'new normal' is going to take an uncertain amount of time, and we're not sure what's on the other side.

- **Reduced support systems**
  Our usual support people may not be physically available due to social distancing, or less emotionally available because they are going through it too.

## HOW CAN THIS TRANSITION BE MANAGED WELL?

We can set everyone up for success by taking the time to think strategically about how we will lead and support employees who are working at home with others present.

**In the coming pages we outline five key strategies:**

| CLEAR SPACES | CREATIVE MANAGEMENT | CONCENTRATION | COMPASSION | CONNECTION |

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# Strategy 1: Clear Spaces

**In supporting the transition to remote work, it is important to help employees establish both a physical and mental workspace.**

Setting up a **physical workspace** creates a distinction between 'home' and 'work'. A **mental workspace** can create needed 'head space' to maintain job performance when there is lots happening in the household. In setting up these clear spaces, it is helpful to think about our daily routines and boundaries.

## SUPPORT CLEAR PHYSICAL SPACES

### Ensure workers are set up safely

- Provide information and resources to ensure a safe work set up, e.g. ergonomic workstation set up guidelines, referral to internal consultants, health and safety team.

- Home networks may not be as secure as corporate networks. Proactively manage cyber-risks and train employees on data and compliance issues.

### Ensure all employees have the necessary equipment and IT access to perform their job

- Discuss options for provision of equipment, e.g. chair, laptop raise, cable covers, printer, noise cancelling headphones, storage equipment to keep children safe from work equipment (and vice versa!).

- Consider knowledge management processes within your team/organisation—how will your employees access the information and documentation they need throughout the day and after hours?

> ❝ This will be an ongoing discussion as needs, challenges and work-arounds evolve over time. **It cannot be 'set and forget'!**

## SUPPORT CLEAR MENTAL SPACES

Get to know your employees' workstyles. They could be a 'separator' who likes to have clear boundaries between work and home, an 'integrator' who can easily mix work and personal time during the day, or a cycler whose work fluctuates throughout the week or month. (Source: Managing Work life in the Digital Age, 2016)

### Encourage employees to:

- Transition-in, e.g. send a 'good morning' message via IM to the team, take turns choosing and playing a Team Song each morning, etc.
- Transition-out, e.g. spend 2-3 minutes taking stock of work and preparing for the next day, create a ritual to transition back into family time, hold a five-minute Team Walk via conference call to mark the end of each day.
- Use deliberate transitions if working in blocks during the day. See https://www.dradamfraser.com/blog-content/2016/11/7/the-third-space

## SUPPORT CLEAR BOUNDARIES

### Be explicit about what's required—what, when, who

- Review workload regularly and ensure it is realistic.
- Give as much autonomy over work completion as you can.
- Clearly communicate how you will keep track of productivity and what you will measure to ensure targets are met.
- Be transparent about distribution of work within the team.
- Review demands and challenges which may require additional flexibility.

### Be informed about legal obligations and employee entitlements

- Be clear about leave options and arrangements. Refer to **Resource: Legal Obligations Relating to Working from Home**, page 12–13.

### Encourage routines

- Routines preserve our sense of normality and help us feel calm and in control of our lives—but right now, it's essential that this is done with flexibility.
- Recognise that each day will look different for your employee depending on the needs of kids and partner.
- Where possible, agree to broad principles rather than fixed timeframes, e.g. 'let's aim to talk at least once a day'.
- Encourage employees to intentionally 'clock-off' each day.

### Agree on realistic working hours, and support 'trial and error'

- Employees working at home with kids may need to work differently.
- Support your team to try different approaches to see what works for them:
  > Spreading work across evenings or weekends.
  > Creating a seven-day working week alone, or with their partner.
  > Working in 2-hour 'shifts' with partner, i.e. taking turns minding the kids.

### Create clear boundaries around communication

- Agree on team norms in relation to communication, e.g. phone calls or instant messaging (IM) for urgent queries, email for less urgent matters or information sharing, video conferencing for team calls.
- As a team, agree on suitable days/times for teleconferencing. If there are conflicting needs, rotate meeting times to minimise impact on any one person. Get clear on 'Go / No-Go' times for employees, e.g. no conference calls before 9am or after 5pm.

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## Strategy 2: Creative Management

> "
>
> Creativity is intelligence having fun.
>
> ALBERT EINSTEIN

This 'new normal' is going to require a lot of creative problem solving. It's essential that the leader brings creativity and an open mind to exploring different ways of working and supporting employees. Below are some ideas to get you started.

**Be creative about how employees do their work**

- How do home-working arrangements impact the achievement of your organisation's strategic goals? Now's the time to throw out the rulebook and think of innovative ways to achieve those goals in different ways.

- Brainstorm with your team about how team processes may need to change in light of the changing circumstances.

- For additional ideas, direct employees to this Guide's companion resource: **Transition to Home What do I need to know about working from home with kids and partners through COVID -19? (Working Parent Guide)**: https://pwwp.org.au/resource/covid-19/

**Make use of technology, and support employees to use it well**

- If employees are using new technology for the first time, provide training or nominate 'champions' to provide support within teams

- Don't rely on one tool for every aspect of communication—they are not designed to do everything, and no one size fits all.

**Share creativity**

- Encourage brainstorming and share these at team meetings.

- Have a platform across the team or organisation to share what works when working from home. Employees working from home with kids and/ or partners may have limited headspace to come up with creative options, so encourage idea-sharing and connection to other working parents.

Some companies are sending a physical 'care package' to all members of the team, to be opened at a meeting time. As well as demonstrating support, it creates a fun shared experience to help reduce feelings of isolation and promote a sense of belonging.

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# Strategy 3: Concentration

**Working with others at home will likely test the concentration of your teams like never before.**

There are undoubtedly distractions in the workplace, however working from home with kids and/or partners will present unique challenges.

Concentration is also affected by poor sleep, hunger, anxiety and stress. When a person is unable to focus on a task their productivity and decision-making is likely to suffer.

By understanding this, leaders can be clear, compassionate and creative in supporting and leading employees at this time.

### Agree on best practice for concentration

- Encourage others to plan around their preferred workstyle: separator, integrator or cycler (see **Strategy 1: Clear Spaces** page 5 and Managing Work life in the Digital Age, 2016).
- Support employees to create work routines that make the best use of their optimal concentration times, e.g. during kids' naps, morning person vs. night owl.
- Provide clarity on priorities so that employees can manage their critical work deliverables around their own peak concentration times
- Suggest techniques to support concentration, for example:
  > Turning email notifications off for a block of time each day.
  > Agree on 'Do Not Disturb' times.
  > Try the Pomodoro Technique. This time management approach uses a timer to work in 25-minute bursts, followed by a short break. For more information, see: https://francescocirillo.com/pages/pomodoro-technique
- Review how information is disseminated. For example, a summary email at the end of the day may be less taxing on concentration than frequent interruptions.

### Be aware of concentration levels

- If someone doesn't seem to be concentrating, ask how things are going (it can be harder to read people when not face-to-face).
- If you or your employee(s) are finding it hard to concentrate, offer to reschedule the call.

### Encourage thoughtfulness about team communications

- It's easy to become overloaded with news about the pandemic, funny memes, videos and team jokes, in addition to work communication. Help your team agree to an appropriate level of communication—there's no need to shut down daily banter, but encourage employees to be thoughtful about volume, or create social vs. work channels.

### Support employees to manage anxiety

- Anxious rumination can impact concentration. Employees managing working from home with kids and/or partner may be worried about a number of issues.
- Proactively discuss and plan for potential challenges, e.g. home learning, both to manage the impact and reduce associated worry.
- Encourage the use of EAP, HR team and any other wellbeing services offered by your organisation. For a list of useful resources to support mental health and wellbeing, visit the PWWP website: https://pwwp.org.au/resource/covid-19/

### Encourage self-care—including yours

- Good wellbeing (sleep, nutrition, regular physical movement) is the foundation for mental wellbeing, including concentration. At times of stress and overload, people often neglect basic wellbeing. Encourage employees to take time to stay well.
- Promote internal informational resources on wellbeing (such as intranet portals), external resources, and advocate EAP as a coaching resource to promote wellbeing habits.

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# Strategy 4: Compassion

**Compassionate leaders think consciously and deliberately about showing up for their teams and their clients/customers. Importantly, it starts with self-compassion.**

This is a unique time when leaders may simultaneously be navigating the same issues as those they are trying to support. More than ever, the mental and physical health and wellbeing of leaders will be essential for both themselves and their teams to function effectively. We're not going to be in this transition state forever, but we'll be here for a while.

## SELF-COMPASSION

### Pay attention to yourself

- Know the early warning signs that suggest you're having difficulty coping—is it muscle tension, poor sleep, feeling intolerant towards others, yelling at the kids?

- To ground yourself when needed, try Russ Harris's 'FACE COVID' approach: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmvNCdpHUYM

### Get support if needed

- Speak to your HR representative, contact your EAP, or refer to the PWWP website for links to trusted resources, including this Guide's companion resource **Transition To Home: What do I need to know about working from home with kids and partners through COVID-19? (Working Parent Guide)**, or refer to PWWP website for a list of trusted resources to support your mental health and wellbeing, https://pwwp.org.au/resource/covid-19/

> **"** Remember to 'put your own oxygen mask on first'. As a leader, it is critical for you to look after your own wellbeing, for the good of your team so that you can be strong and compassionate when your employees need you.
>
> BRI HAYLLAR / SENIOR CONSULTANT PSYCHOLOGIST / TRANSITIONING WELL

## COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

### Seek to understand

- Take the time to deeply understand the circumstances of each of your employees, and how this transition is impacting them. Creating an environment of psychological safety is important for supporting their wellbeing and productivity.

- Compassionately acknowledging and addressing the challenges faced by employees working from home with others builds trust and demonstrates support. Even if they are going well, trusting that they can bring concerns to you is already a powerful form of support.

- If you notice changes in their usual standard of work:
  > Start with compassion. Put yourself in their shoes.
  > Talk to them about your observations, and ask what support they need.
  > Above all, ask—don't assume.

- Leaders who recognise the signs of distress, anxiety and depression or family and domestic violence are more equipped to respond quickly with support. Be informed. For a list of trusted mental health and wellbeing resources (including helplines), refer to https://pwwp.org.au/resource/covid-19/, or speak to HR.

- Be aware of any biases you may have, or limits to your understanding, e.g. If you don't have kids or aren't sharing a workspace yourself, talk to friends or family who are.

### Be proactive

- Don't wait for employees to come to you with distress before you talk about wellbeing. Initiate conversations about wellbeing and coping as a regular part of check-ins.

- Promote a mindset for yourself and your team of 'unconditional positive regard'—that's when we assume that everyone is just trying to do their best (because they probably are).

### Share resources

- Begin weekly meetings with a 'resource share'—an opportunity for employees to mention good ideas or resources they have come across.

- Recognise that your clients/customers and suppliers are dealing with the same challenges you are. Encourage your employees to show empathy, and if time allows, share what has and has not worked for your organisation.

- Leaders often report feeling unsure about how to support employees with emotional or complex needs. If needed, ask your HR team for support and guidance, contact your EAP (remember that some EAPs have a Manager Assist service). You can also refer employees to the PWWP website for a list of trusted resources to support mental health and wellbeing: https://pwwp.org.au/resource/covid-19/

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# Strategy 5: Connection

**We are social animals, and our need for human interaction has never been more apparent. Leading employees from a physical distance means it is even more important to make a conscious effort to actively connect.**

Leaders need to ensure they keep communicating their needs and expectations, and that they keep checking the needs and expectations of their employees; setting up a shared understanding to always ask rather than assume.

"

*Try to pull yourself out of the 'here and now'. Think about your team/family in a year's time, looking back at what we have all been through … what do you want everyone to experience? And what are the things that you most want them to remember about the way you were as a team/family during this time?*

SHARON BENT / SENIOR CONSULTANT
ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST /
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## CONNECT WITH THE PERSON, NOT JUST THE TASK

- Don't make catch ups all about targets and tasks.
    - > Check in on wellbeing. Those caring for children 24/7 may be particularly overloaded.
    - > Mitigate risk of stress and burnout by proactively offering support, and encourage people to use them early, before there are serious impacts to health.
    - > For employees experiencing high levels of distress, support them to access EAP and to link in with HR to guide any necessary support and modifications.
- Take the time each day to greet your team members to help them feel acknowledged and valued.
- Thank and publicly acknowledge achievements, e.g. at the beginning of video conferences, post it on team chat groups or include it in a weekly wrap up. For employees with modified tasks/duties, acknowledge them for what they are able to do.
- Inject some humour—it can strengthen relationships through the shared experience and is a great tension reliever.

## MAKE YOUR CHOICE OF COMMUNICATION DELIBERATE

- Tailor the 'when and how' of your communication for each employee and their needs. If in doubt, ask them what they need. **See Strategy 1: Clear Spaces / Supporting Clear Boundaries** page 5.
- Avoid exclusively using text-based communication. Signs that an employee is not coping are often conveyed visually or through tone of voice, e.g. looking tired, facial expressions, irritability, flat emotion. A leader may also also observe stressors or challenges in the background home environment that indicate an employee is not in a safe and healthy space.

## CONNECT THE TEAM

- 'A problem shared is a problem halved'. Encourage teams to connect with each other for social support as well as problem solving.
- Create buddy or mentoring relationships. Those working from home with kids and/or partners might appreciate partnering with those who can appreciate the experience. If available, use the Working Parent Network to connect people. For more information, refer to **Resource: Setting up a Working Parent Network**: https://pwwp.org.au/resource/resource-sheets/
- Fostering a safe and healthy work environment is a shared responsibility— encourage everyone in the team to support each other's wellbeing and facilitate ways for the team to connect.
- Have social gatherings for the team but rotate the timing to ensure everyone can be included—end of the day is often 'witching hour' for those with small kids.
- Consider options for team breaks (tea breaks, lunch breaks etc) that welcome children or other family members. This is an opportunity to celebrate families and reduce stress on those working from home with kids and/or partners.
- To encourage everyone in the team to 'show up' with empathy and compassion, set aside time in meetings to share challenges. Having perspective on what other people are dealing with increases the likelihood that we will respond with empathy and helpfulness rather than irritation.

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Not long ago, only one in three Australians regularly worked from home.

SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS, 2016

## Other Considerations

It is important for leaders to be aware that some employees may be exposed to different, and at times substantial demands and risk factors as a result of working from home with kids and/or partners.

Although beyond the scope of this resource sheet, we draw your attention to the special considerations that may be required by:

• Single parents.

• Shared-custody parents.

• Health-worker or front-line families.

• Those with elderly relatives at home.

• Those experiencing family and domestic violence.

• Those with concerns relating to financial security, including stand-downs and redundancy.

• Those with pre-existing mental health concerns.

• And many others…

We stress the need for leaders to listen to employee concerns, offer appropriate support and provide reasonable management of any associated risks for those workers. This may include liaising with internal supports such as HR, or external consultants.

**To help you and your employees navigate this time, we encourage you to:**

• Understand the support available and actively encourage others to make use of it, including EAP access, HR resources and other wellbeing programs.

• Refer to the PWWP website for a list of trusted resources (including helplines) to support you through this time: https://pwwp.org.au/resource/COVID-19/

• See our **Resource Sheet: Supporting the Ongoing Seasons of Working Parenthood**: https://pwwp.org.au/resource/resource-sheets/

• Understand employee legal rights and entitlements. Refer to **Resource: Your Legal Obligations in the COVID-19 Pandemic** on page 12-13. For information and guidance on employment related matters, see Fair Work Australia (www.fairwork.gov.au) . For financial assistance, see Centrelink (www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/centrelink)

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# Resource: Leader Checklist

**CLEAR SPACES**
- ☐ Check workstation setup. Support employee to create both physical and mental spaces.
- ☐ Check equipment required.
- ☐ Training for new technology and protocols (including cyber security).
- ☐ Knowledge management processes—can everyone access what they need to?
- ☐ Workstyle—separator, integrator or cycler? How does this fit in with current circumstances?
- ☐ Set clear expectations and priorities.
- ☐ Discuss how productivity will be measured.
- ☐ Given unique circumstances, what routines make most sense?
- ☐ Realistic working hours, how to best navigate the day.
- ☐ Demonstrate support for 'trial and error'. Adjust as needed.
- ☐ Agree communication norms within team.
- ☐ Any go/no-go times for conference calls?
- ☐ Share what's working for others in the business.

**CREATIVE MANAGEMENT**
- ☐ Discuss how to achieve our organisation's strategic goals under current circumstances.
- ☐ Any necessary changes to team processes?
- ☐ Agree tools for different types of communication.
- ☐ Create a mechanism for team members to share creative ideas / what's working well for them.
- ☐ Connect working parents to each other.

**CONCENTRATION**
- ☐ Discuss each person's optimal working time, e.g. night owl, morning person.
- ☐ Discuss and plan for potential challenges, e.g. home learning.
- ☐ Encourage overall wellbeing, i.e. adequate sleep, nutrition, regular physical activity.

**COMPASSION**
- ☐ As a leader, manage your own mental health and wellbeing.
- ☐ Make yourself aware of the support available for you.
- ☐ Ensure employees are aware of what support is available to them.
- ☐ Educate yourself on mental health issues and family and domestic violence considerations.
- ☐ If issues arise, seek to understand. Start with compassion and assume everyone is doing the best.
- ☐ Make wellbeing and coping conversations part of the daily check-in.

**CONNECTION**
- ☐ Connect with the person—not just the worker.
- ☐ Greet each employee daily.
- ☐ Thank and publicly acknowledge achievements.
- ☐ Link employees with internal and external sources of support, e.g. buddy/mentor.
- ☐ Adapt your approach to each person and their circumstances.
- ☐ Have online team social gatherings.
- ☐ Encourage team to share their challenges to build compassion for each other.
- ☐ Pay special attention to those with additional considerations.

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# Resource:
# Legal Obligations
# Relating to Working
# from Home

Advice current as at 1 April 2020

**HR**Legal

**Employers have a legal obligation to provide a safe and healthy work environment for all employees, so far as is reasonably practicable. There are a number of legal and practical considerations for employees working from home as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

## WORKING FROM HOME POLICIES AND CHECKLISTS

Employers should ensure that Working from Home policies are up to date in response to the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic. Employers still owe obligations to employees whilst working from home to ensure the working environment is safe and without risks to health.

Employers should consider what equipment will be required by employees, both from a safety perspective and to ensure the employee is able to effectively work remotely. They should ensure IT systems enable the ability to work from home (whether its conferencing or other collaborative tools) and employees know how to access and use these.

Given the present circumstances, a comprehensive assessment that an employer may ordinarily do if an employee had requested flexible arrangements may not be possible. In this context, the minimum steps an employer should take are to:

- Provide information to employees about how best to set up their home workspace to be safe. The factors will vary depending on the type of work they are performing from home. In most cases, the minimum requirements will be to ensure their home workspace is ergonomically sound; and

- Ask employees to undertake a self-assessment of their home workspace using simple checklists and confirm the employee has taken steps to appropriately set up their home workspace.

Employers should try to be flexible with their employees where possible, including in terms of expectations as to productivity in these unusual circumstances. They should be particularly mindful that employees may need increased flexibility to look after children, elderly parents or sick family members which will in turn impact their ability to work effectively.

## MENTAL HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

An employer's safety obligations to employees working remotely are do not only pertain to ergonomic factors. Safety obligations include psychological safety, and it will be particularly important for employers and leaders to keep this front of mind while a large proportion of the workforce are working remotely.

Working from home for extended periods of time can be isolating, particularly for those workers who live alone, and this can increase the risk of employees developing or exacerbating mental health issues.

Further, new employees who do not have established networks, and those who are not technologically savvy, are particularly vulnerable. They may not know how to virtually connect to their colleagues, or may feel reticent to reach out to colleagues to discuss feelings of loneliness or isolation.

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# Resource:
# Legal Obligations Relating to Working from Home

Advice current as at 1 April 2020

**HR**Legal

Leaders will play a critical role in monitoring health of employees, particularly from a mental health perspective. It is important for leaders to maintain regular communication through emails, virtual meetings and phone check-ins, particularly for workers who have known pre-existing mental health issues or fall into these more vulnerable categories.

## MANAGING PERFORMANCE AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

While employers need to be flexible and realistic in terms of performance expectations while employees are working remotely, they can and should still manage performance of staff who are working remotely. Employers should therefore give consideration to how they are going to coordinate work, manage performance and other work processes.

With reduced human contact and employee communication whilst employees are working from home, employers should contemplate how they will manage employees' workloads. There is of course a higher degree of trust involved when employees work remotely.

As outlined above, employers should be conscious that there may be other issues at play where there is a reduction in an employee's performance, including wellbeing factors. These could range from employees struggling to balance working from home and caring responsibilities, to mental health issues caused by increased social isolation.

Where there are performance concerns and a decrease in productivity, employers should ensure that they regularly e-meet with the employee to discuss these concerns and set reasonable and measurable objectives.

Performance management processes may need to be adapted to include virtual or telephone meetings to discuss objectives, online tools should be used to track progress, and reviews should be based on accomplishments of goals.

Communication is key: managers will need to speak frequently and effectively with their staff about performance expectations and work processes, engage with technologies to assist, and adapt to the practicalities of working remotely.

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## Resource:
## Useful Resources
## Relating to the
## COVID-19 Pandemic

As the situation with COVID-19 is rapidly changing, we have created a dedicated page of resources to support you during this time.

This page is being regularly updated.

Please visit https://pwwp.org.au/resource/covid-19/ for further information.



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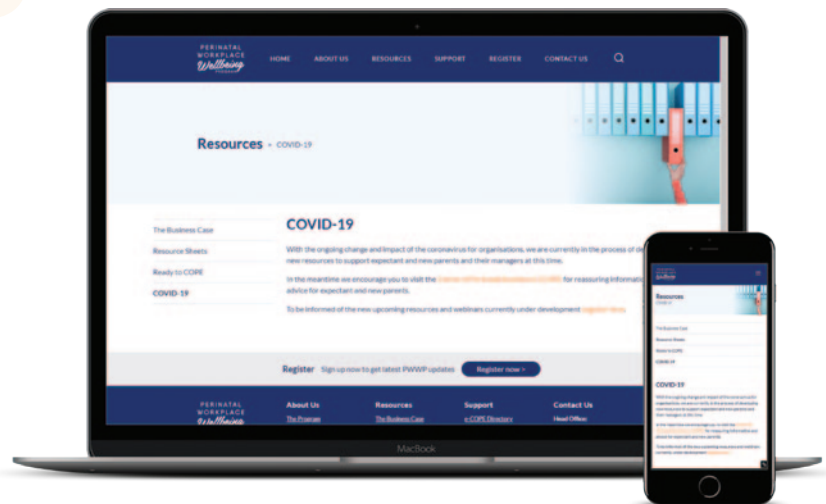
## For more information
## about the PWWP

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