



**" THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF
WORKING IN ISOLATION - THE HOME
WORKING CHALLENGE."**

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Why you need to deal with the psychology of home working

- This is going to last months, not weeks. You need a strategy in place quickly.
- Your teams are not used to working from home and you are not used to managing remotely.
- For your team members:
 - Isolation from other people is a serious threat to mental health - that's why solitary confinement is used as a punishment or even torture.
 - Those who are with their families may have to deal with the stress of childcare, lack of a quiet working space and constant disruption.
 - Staff will feel isolated from their fellow team members - collaboration requires much more effort.
 - Many will be anxious about their and their family's health, the future of their jobs, money, bills, separation from friends and loved ones.
- For you as leaders:
 - Recognise you will be feeling the same as your team members.
 - Your teams need your leadership, support, care and understanding more than ever.
 - You need to be pro-active in finding ways to communicate more frequently and in better ways to ensure support and collaboration.
 - This is about your responsibility for the mental health of your staff and the long-term future of your business.
 - You are not alone as a leader - reach out to colleagues in other firms. It is new for everyone.

Have you reflected on and planned for the psychological challenges?

- How will you adapt to the new paradigm? Do you need to modify existing goals / develop new ones? What can stay the same & what needs to change?
- What measures will you put in place to make home working as healthy as possible?
- How will you manage the emotional impact on your mental health, your family, your colleagues and team?
- How can you best take care of yourself and others? What are your plans to tackle isolation?
- What self-care practices can you introduce to guard against burnout and build resilience?
- What's your mindset toward CV19 and this transition? How are you going to manage it: acceptance & adaptation or over-control and denial?
- How will you stay wise and make positive choices: *"If you had only two weeks to live what would you be doing now?"* (asking this question is a way to connect to what's important to you and what you wish to stand for).

Home working best practices

- Normal Structure makes life more predictable. Stabilising begins at home. Keeping our normal routines as much as is possible can provide a sense of security
- Keep a work structure with set hours (make sure to give yourself the same hours off that you would normally have)
- Establish your workspace and /or use different spaces in the house and moving between them
- Maintain standards: appropriate dress, personal care
- Don't get distracted by household chores or the news
- Pace yourself. Take regular movement breaks (esp. as home ergonomics may compromise your posture)
- Turn off notifications and take breaks from devices
- Stay connected to colleagues on a personal level

Managing Isolation

- Social distancing doesn't mean disconnecting
- Stay connected with others. We're in this together. Reach out.
- Remember compassion to others and self: *"Just like me..."* - many others out there will be feeling the same as you (anxiety, overwhelm, hope)
- Self-care: now more than ever is the time to maintain exercise, as good a diet as possible and a regular sleep pattern
- Regular voice and sight communications - not just writing
- "Out of sight, out of mind." Isolation is not just personal: be aware of Development, Resource and Opportunity isolation
- Maintain joint activities – not just business but social e.g. Grab a remote coffee with your team or play scrabble: e.g. [donut.com](https://www.donut.com)
- Explore collaborative working tools: [Nuclino](#) [Mural](#) [Slack](#)

Supporting your team

Fear is a normal response to threat. What makes you feel anxious? This is probably the same for your team. How will you help manage their anxiety and isolation?

- Ask yourself: *“How can I help this person to have a better day?”* With that simple question, amazing things begin to happen
- Just saying *“I’m here”*
- Enhanced Communication online:
 - most conversations will happen in writing, and the lack of body language, facial expression, and intonation can easily breed misunderstanding.
 - aim to communicate more frequently and more specifically than usual
 - some managers have implemented virtual “team lunch” or “coffee catch-up” calls for everyone on their team to virtually eat together and catch up
- Converting to a virtual team may take time – patience. Broaden communication channels from just email e.g. [Slack](#) [Zoom](#) [Microsoft Teams](#) [Skype](#) [WhatsApp](#)
- Frequently reach out to your team on a personal level.
- Ask yourself if you're working with your team or against them?
- Now is a good time to develop Mindful Leadership: potentialproject.com [The Mind of the Leader](#)

Managing emotions

- Don't overfeed the anxiety monster! What makes you feel anxious? What is real and what is imagined?
- Connecting with others through compassion brings anxiety down. So much research shows being altruistic and kind to others benefits us - It's a no brainer!
- Mental resilience includes the skill of noticing our own thoughts, unhooking from the obsessive and non-constructive ones and rebalancing quickly. This skill can be nurtured and trained through mindfulness e.g. [oxfordmindfulness.org](https://www.oxfordmindfulness.org)
- Beware obsessing on news. Limit your access to news; get good quality news; be mindful what you take in and no news or devices 2 hours before bed
- Continue (or start) to exercise, to dissipate effects of anxiety on body and mind
- Facing vs denying difficult feelings – mindfulness meditation helps
- Learn to stop and pause – try the “3 minute breathing space” [YouTube - 3 minute breathing space](#)
- If you need to there are some great Cognitive Behavioural Therapy self help courses online e.g. [cci.health.wa.gov.au Looking After Yourself](https://cci.health.wa.gov.au/looking-after-yourself)
- What's in your emotional management toolkit?
- Remember: for the most part this will pass and you will be ok at the end if you follow the directions and maintain social distancing

Practical tips

- Work less and to spend more time looking out the window and watching the sky...
- Limit news checking
- Taking control of what we can: families keep a familiar routine and structure, have a family meal together
- Insert intentional exercise into the day (throughout the day).
- Hold on to hope and humour
- What opportunities does this create? *What did you also want to do you never had time for?*
- Self-care: Eating health, getting exercise, meditating, staying present with the now and connecting with loved ones. Have fun. Maybe this can be a time of retreat and restoration
- Connection is a protective factor: call a friend /family member each day

Further resources

- Mindfulness apps. potentialproject.com
- Virtual parties: [6 killer ideas virtualaparties](#)
- A digital workspace for collaboration mural.co
- Grab a remote coffee with your team: donut.com/
- Want to be 10% happier? [tenpercent.com Coronavirus Sanity Guide](https://tenpercent.com)
- “Finding peace in a Frantic World” by Mark Williams and Danny Penman. Here on [Amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk)

Finally, ask yourself:

“When this is over and you look back on this episode, how would you like to have approached this situation?”

This gives a sense that it will pass and a way to check-in with ourselves and choose wise behaviours