Working Remotely

**Purpose for this module**: Understand the issues and some of the ways to deal with them whether for yourself to optimise when working at home and/or to support your colleagues/team members to work at home.

# Overview

**Create a structure** to manage yourself and your environment to help you focus on work and avoid distractions when working from home.

*Physical boundaries* – time and space. Also mental and behavioural boundaries – with routines, mindset, setting expectations, clarifying work practices for working remotely, and to get on with everyone at home

*Focus* – manage distractions, schedule time, shift mindset to not do home things but work things during work time, and vice versa

*Time management* – e.g.: Priorities, Break tasks to small steps, Pomodoro. Power Hour, 90 minute Do Not Disturb, 5, 10 & 15 minute slots

*Energy management* – breaks, family,

*Mind management* – focus on what you can control, look for the positives, funnies, laughter – and realise that when you are stressed you are less able to concentrate, focus and make good decisions, and are more susceptible to amygdala hijack.

*Covid 19 lockdown* – This is an even more unusual situation where you may be totally isolated at your home with no physical human contact or your whole family is confined to the house and getting on top of each other and not used to it. It helps to create structure to give each other personal space and for when you do things together.

## Manage Your Environment – Physical Space

### 1. Dedicated Work Area

* This helps you to focus and shift into your work mindset when you physically go to the dedicated space.
* The ideal is a separate room, where you can close the door on home/work when you enter/leave your workspace.
* Otherwise at least a dedicated table/desk, which is permanently your office space.
* Many people don’t have the luxury of dedicated workspace in their home and are working from the kitchen table, dining room table, coffee table or in their bedroom. If you have to use a shared space (whether you share it with other people or it is shared between your home life and work life) where you clear away your office things each time it is needed for something else, try at least to have a tray to store all your office things. As well as the convenience of having work things all together, the act of getting out your ‘office workstation’ will help you to shift out of ‘home mode’ into ‘work mode’.

### 2. Comfort: Health and Wellbeing

Choose a workstation that supports you to maintain physical health – it is just as important for your home workstation as it is at your employer’s office space! Sitting for long hours each day in front of a computer is not healthy and made worse if the set-up is not ergonomic. When working from home you may find that you have even longer at a computer than in your normal workspace, because your meetings are all now online and via a computer screen.

* Can you borrow / buy a chair that supports you to sit at the correct height to the table/computer? That prevents back and shoulder strain from using the computer mouse.
* Set your screen at the correct height so your neck is not craned forward or at an angle, and your overall posture is aligned.
* Plan in ways to increase movement during your hours of work – whether short breaks (see managing time and energy section) or the physical set up of your workspace.
* Consider a standing desk, or one which has options for sitting and standing
* Ergonomic or office chair. Or a saddle chair? Or an exercise ball as a chair? (Great for posture and core muscle tone!)
* Check screen height, desk height, position for keyboard and mouse, wrist supports at keyboard and on mousepad?
* Good lighting – from the side/above/behind you but not directly behind your screen. Sufficient light levels to not strain eyes.

### 3. Reduce Distractions

* Location of desk – e.g. with your back to the rest of the room, ideally facing a wall with no distractions.
* Symbol to indicate to yourself and to others that you are now in work and not ‘in home mode’ and not to disturb you.
* Something to recreate the ‘office environment’ that you have at work – think of what you would have on the wall there and what could help to recreate that atmosphere for you at your home work space, and help you feel ‘in work’ e.g. calendar/schedule on the wall, team photo, project purpose/goals, etc. Dress for work – your clothes create a feel of being at work and show your colleagues on video conferences that you are in work.
* What do you have ‘at hand’ when you are working in your office? Aim to have as much as is reasonable easily to hand at your home office, so that when you need it you don’t have to search/go somewhere in the house to get it, e.g. paper, pens, laptop, phone, diary, reference materials, etc.
* Recognise what helps you focus and keep in flow when you are working and do the same, if possible, at your home workstation – e.g. a cup of coffee/water at the desk.
* Recognise what is on your mind when you first go into work and metaphorically put all that ‘busyness’ at the door to pick up afterwards. Or write it down so you can come back to it later.
* Recognise what distracts you and take action to minimise – e.g.: switch off computer alerts for emails etc. Arrange times with colleagues / family for when you have ‘open door’ and when you should not be disturbed (e.g. your power hour) and share your schedule with everyone (no need for details on it but it helps for people to know when you are in a meeting etc. as they are less likely to choose that time to call you).
* Use your To Do list and schedule to keep your focus. The deadlines help you to not respond to distractors.
* Music. Some people find background music helps them concentrate and ignore noises outside. Other people find music itself a distraction, especially if you are doing work that requires cognitive thought, analysis or writing. Go with what works for you. I recommend you avoid talking programmes – e.g.: I used to find I’d lost half an hour without realising it as I’d got so involved to listening to the show on Radio 4 that I forgot about working!

### 4. Technology

Work with your manager/employer to ensure that you have the appropriate technology to enable you to connect with your colleagues and do your work.

* Aim to replicate the equipment you would have at your workplace if you can. E.g. if you have two monitors there, use two monitors at home. An old TV with HDMI cable works well as a second computer monitor (and usually has better audio quality as well as being a bigger screen!)
* Computer/laptop/tablet – sufficiently up-to-date operating system and capacity to use all required software plus video camera and microphone for video conferencing
* Internet connection
* Required software – e.g. for video conferencing, office software that is the same as that used in your work, appropriate firewalls and virus checkers, etc.
* IT support to connect to your employer’s network if relevant and for cyber security
* Clear information on processes, technology etc. to use
* Check/increase the minutes on your mobile phone contract if you now need to make more calls on it than you would when working from your employer’s workplace.