

## PURPOSE

This guide provides tips on hybrid working for individuals and managers.

The new 'normal' post pandemic looks different for many, but one thing that seems to be common across professional industries is the appetite for hybrid working. Corporate Australia has proven their ability to remain efficient and productive while working from home. It is also clear that different people have differing preferences and productivity levels depending on if they are working in the office every day or working from home.

## HYBRID WORKING – IT'S A BALANCING ACT

The benefits of hybrid working are plentiful, with praises such as less time spent travelling and more time available for preparing for meetings or taking calls. Similar thoughts have been shared in the [Harvard Business Review article, \*How to do Hybrid Right\*](#):

*The two hours many people spend commuting is wasted – we can use that time for education, training, time with our family. We need many ideas about how to make remote work effective. We are embarking on a work-life shift.*

While hybrid working is not for every person, or for every business, some organisations have adopted a permanent policy allowing a mix of working from home and attending the office.

### Being attuned to mental health challenges and stressors

During the pandemic there was a shift in the national consciousness of mental health and mental illness. We all became more attuned to the risk of feeling isolated without social interaction and connection. Post-pandemic we need to maintain that awareness and be open to the challenges and stressors some people face returning to the office.

Returning the office some people may worry there will be increased work load expectations with less moments throughout the day to self-reflect on current capacity. There is also the added considerations of possibly getting sick, or the costs associated with getting to work such as public transport or petrol fees, all of which are very real stressors to consider in the current climate.

### Tips for individuals:

[The Black Dog Institute](#) has some great tips for individuals to support their wellbeing while working remotely, which remain relevant if your team is split due to hybrid working:

- **Stay connected:** incorporate both regular scheduled meetings with your colleagues for work discussions as well as check-ins or virtual coffee catch ups to maintain a sense of social connection.
- **Build your routine:** avoid blending work with your home life as best as possible by having a pre-work and after-work routine. This may include exercise, scheduled break times, work clothes and home clothes, and creating a workspace for work time only.
- **Get fresh air:** the Black Dog Institute advocates that '*If you're not stuck in self-isolation, try to get outside at least once a day. Go for a walk, get some fresh air, and sunshine. If you are in isolation, go out to your garden or walk up and down your driveway or go out onto your balcony and enjoy fresh air.*'

### Signs of struggle

According to [Beyond Blue](#), warning signs someone is struggling may include:

- **non-verbal indicators:** social withdrawal, a persistent drop in mood, disinterest in maintaining personal hygiene or appearance, uncharacteristically reckless behaviour, poor diet changes, rapid weight changes, being distracted, anger, insomnia, alcohol or drug abuse, giving away sentimental or expensive possessions.
- **verbal indicators:** hopelessness, failing to see a future, believing they are a burden to others, saying they feel worthless or alone.

Through technology, we still can notice disconnection, and changes in body language, appearance, tone of voice, and language that can seem out of the norm.

We should also be aware that some people are at greater risk of poor mental health. For example, [VicHealth](#) points to wellbeing risks such as social isolation, caregiving (including remote schooling, sole parenting, aging parents etc.) and poor physical health conditions.

It is important to remember that vulnerability has many faces, and every individual will react differently to the same situation. It is therefore important to get to know your colleagues and proactively invest extra time into those who are more vulnerable. If you notice a change in their behaviour, follow your gut.

### Support tips

If you are concerned about a colleague offer support with tact, compassion and at the right time. This can be managed by taking a genuine interest in their life and health without being too intrusive, and by respecting privacy and confidentiality. [The RUOK Day Foundation](#) have developed many materials to assist in these types of conversations.

It is important for leaders and managers to also look after themselves. Supporting your emotional health and following healthy work habits is not only important for your own mental health and wellbeing but can also help model practices to employees and put yourself in a better position to lead your team through these challenges.

Some tips on supporting colleagues include:

- **Connect:**
  - find ways to talk more often, such as establishing a buddy system to provide one-on-one connections between individuals (as recommended by [KPMG](#)). Channels need to be created that are two way and provide a mechanism for people to ask questions, share concerns, or raise challenges that may be personal.
  - for managers and leaders, clearly defining expectations and encouraging agency can be an effective approach to addressing concerns about a lack of clarity relating to progress and performance. Additionally, share information and staff updates regularly such as business milestones, changes that will have an impact on employees or personal milestones can keep employees connected to the business and each other.
- **Share knowledge:** make it normal to share articles and spend time discussing the topic with teams. This can help remove stigmas relating to raising concerns and promote the importance of positively 'managing' mental health and wellbeing.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> NFP People, [How to approach an employee who may have poor mental health during the coronavirus lockdown \(blog\) \(2020\)](#)

- **Humanise interactions:** if you manage or lead your business offer encouragement and emotional support, acknowledge, listen, and empathise, and ask questions if an employee is clearly struggling but not communicating stress or anxiety.<sup>2</sup>
- **Review processes and job designs:**
  - have good documentation in place that staff know where to find if they need it.
  - be clear about expected outcomes to help mitigate trust concerns in a working environment with decreased visibility.
  - have structures in place to help you effectively manage your employees such as scheduling regular catchups with team members and establishing rules of engagement on how and when to use communication tools to reach you.

### OTHER RESOURCES

- Heads Up – [Mental health conditions](#) (section on warning signs of poor mental health)
- RUOK – [Resources for work settings](#)
- Black Dog Institute – [Working from home: A checklist to support your mental health](#)

*This guide provides a summary only of the subject matter covered, without the assumption of duty of care by Consult Australia. The summary should not be relied on as a substitute for legal or other professional advice.*

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<sup>2</sup> Harvard Business Review, [15 questions about remote work answered \(2020\)](#)