NAVIGATING COVID & OUR PEOPLE

–CONNECT AND ENGAGE

Businesses across the country are navigating extraordinary challenges while working within various alert levels and preparing for the traffic light system.

To keep businesses moving forward through these ultra-challenging times, engaging with your teams is vital. For many employees, stress and anxiety levels will be escalated, and those working from home may be facing a multitude of hurdles, from sharing workspaces with family members to juggling childcare and worrying about finances.

That's why the team at Safety 'n Action believes simple actions like checking in regularly with your staff is so important.

"The environment we are all currently in exposes staff and businesses to some quite different health and safety risks, particularly when it comes to mental health," says Safety 'n Action's National Trainer Director Nicholas Matzopulous (Nick).

"The bonds and friendships people forge in the workplace contribute positively to productivity, job satisfaction and a positive mindset. Working from home changes this and can lead to feelings of loneliness, isolation and lack of motivation."

By connecting and engaging regularly with teams, employers, managers and supervisors can play an important role in boosting morale, improving staff wellbeing, and maintaining productivity.

"It's about much more than just communicating with employees to outline work tasks and outputs. Encourage staff to also maintain their social workplace connections through video chats, friendly calls and daily check-ins. Agree with some 'work from home team rules' that work for everyone in your team, and keep the conversation flowing to manage expectations. Employers need to accept that working-from-home success might look quite different than it does in the workplace. The usual performance targets or time-based approach may just not be appropriate right now."

Poor work environment, poor work design and a lack of social connections all pose mental health risks for those working from home, and endeavoring to set up a healthy workspace is an important first step.

WorkSafe NZ has plenty of useful tips to help those working from home make the working week more bearable and productive. These include:

- Find an area in your home that allows you to work effectively – and discuss your needs with everyone else in your bubble so you can work with, and around each other harmoniously
- Create physical and mental boundaries between home life and work life – that could be anything from using screens to create an "office" in the living room to covering your work area with a sheet at the end of each day and taking a walk around the block to transition between work time and home time
- Work with your manager to ensure you have the equipment you need to get the job done from home – find out what systems and processes you need to use, and discuss whether some tasks are more suitable to do at home than others
- Set a routine – steady schedules can help keep the lines between work and personal time clear
- Build in time to learn – just because you're working from home, doesn't mean you can't keep learning. Discuss with your manager what new skills you need to learn and which information and courses you can access.

In fact, according to Nick, boosting online learning while teams are working from home brings a raft of benefits. Not only does it add some structure into employees' workdays, but it helps gear up the workforce so they can hit the ground running when restrictions ease.

"Working remotely can be a great time for staff to complete online courses such as all-important safety training. Safety obligations don't stop or go away just because we're navigating our way through covid restrictions – it's important to keep workplace safety front and centre."

Safety 'n Action has industry leading [digital training programmes](#) that can help businesses stay on top of their health and safety training needs as we move together through the pandemic.

Explains Nick, "It's often hard to see a way forward when you're scrambling to keep your teams engaged, preparing to get back out there or playing catch up as restrictions ease, but working from home during the current restrictions can actually be an ideal time to focus on workplace health and safety."

Mental health and wellbeing are an integral part of that, and the need for teams to feel valued and supported is possibly greater now than it's ever been.

According to [depression.org.nz,](#) a vast number of the population are feeling stressed, anxious, overwhelmed and uncertain – and that's absolutely normal given the global

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situation. Luckily, they offer plenty of great tips and tricks to help people stay connected and take care of their wellbeing during these difficult times. Here are a few ideas:

- When it comes to media coverage find a healthy balance – stay informed but limit your media intake if it's too upsetting. Stick to reliable sources such as the New Zealand government's Unite Against COVID-19 website or the World Health Organisation
- Get active and get out into nature
- Allow yourself a few treats - enjoy staying in bed a little longer in the mornings
- Eat healthy food, keep alcohol intake to a minimum
- Do things that make you feel good – reignite an old hobby or pick up a new one, practice gratitude, savour the extra time you're getting to spend with family
- If you're worried about money, financial support is available through the wage subsidy, leave and income relief support, business cash flow and tax measures
- And most importantly keep scanning those QR codes on the NZ covid tracer app!

With a bit of kindness, empathy and understanding, we can all get through this together.

Related resources

https://www.safetynaction.co.nz/en/elearning/

https://depression.org.nz/covid-19/covid-19/

https://www.healthandsafety.govt.nz/assets/Documents/2020-working-from-home-during-COVID-19-v2.pdf

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