

**Move in a healthy direction**

# Working Remotely:

An Employer’s Guide

 

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## **Introduction**

More and more people are now working remotely, either at home or from other locations, particularly since the pandemic.

Working from home, or from other locations does present both advantages and disadvantages for both the employer and employee, and some benefits and risks to health, which should be considered.

This guide aims to support employers when considering home or remote working, and make sure that they have the right policies in place to make it as effective as possible.

## **Benefits of working remotely**

* Possibility of working in a quieter environment with less distractions, increased ability to focus
* Supports efforts to reduce climate change through reduced travel and therefore emission decrease.
* Time spent commuting is saved, as is associated time spent in traffic.
* Reduction in office or premises costs for the employer through reduced office sizes, lower rents and utility bills
* Reduced social interactions to reduce spread of illness. Reduced social interactions can also benefit people with some anxiety based conditions
* Improved flexibility. This can make is easier for employees to balance work and caring responsibilities. For example, remote working could be carried out in the evening, when the usual premises may be closed to allow caring responsibilities to be undertaken during the day. Staff can choose to work at the times that they are most productive.
* Improved flexibility also allows people living with disabilities to have better access to work. This in turn improves the diversity and skills available to a team or organisation.
* Reduced sickness absence. If staff are too unwell to work they should take sick leave and presenteeism should be actively discouraged. However, in some cases it can be beneficial to work from home instead and can aid a return to work as part of the recovery process.
* Demonstrates trust in employees, which can increase engagement and productivity.

## **Disadvantages to working remotely**

* Less support could be available from the employer, or at least it takes more creativity and effort to offer support to staff working remotely
* Increased isolation and less social interaction, which can be a negative experience for some staff
* Staff who may experience domestic abuse will be at greater risk of harm
* Reduced motivation and lack of engagement
* Difficulty switching off from work and increased likelihood in overworking
* Difficulty in managing staff and monitoring performance
* More difficult to control data and cyber security. Remote working without the proper cyber security, confidentiality and data protection policies can increase the risks of cyber security or data confidentiality breaches.
* Increased risk of musculoskeletal disorders if Display Screen Equipment and relevant risk assessments are not completed for working from home or remote working tasks.

## **Making remote working effective**

1. Make sure staff working from home have the right equipment do to their jobs. Encourage staff to set up a designated workspace to help them be work focussed. This will also help to manage boundaries between work and home life. For staff who drive between locations, ensure that they have the correct breaks between meetings and are using a roadworthy vehicle.
2. Have the right cyber security and data protection policies in place. If staff have access to confidential information, consider who else might see this when they are working remotely. If necessary, provide secure storage for any paper files.
3. Ensure relevant risk assessments are completed for home working including Display Screen Equipment and that any additional equipment to reduce and eliminate risks is provided.
4. Schedule regular catch-ups with remote and home workers to keep them updated on progress and support engagement.
5. Make good use of technology. Video messaging, instant messaging services, screen sharing tools and shared drives or calendars can make it easier to work from different sites and home.
6. Include remote workers in team meetings and any social activities that are planned. Try having a team lunch or walking meeting over the phone or via an instant messaging service.
7. Keep communication open with all team members and set clear goals for the team, whether working remotely or at your usual premises. Agree how you will keep each other updated on projects and how often. Encourage and offer regular feedback.
8. Ensure good mental health support is available for all staff, including those working remotely. Have information about sources of support easily accessibly electronically. Train line managers in mental health awareness so they know what to look for with their teams and colleagues.
9. Have senior leadership model good practice around mental health and boundaries. Having people be clear about their work hours, and not putting pressure on people to check emails outside of their working hours can help to manage boundaries between work and home life. Boundaries between work and home life can also be managed by having a different routine on non-working days such as weekends.
10. Encourage staff to live healthy lifestyles even if they are not working in your premises. Activity challenges, and remote recipe swaps not only encourage healthy behaviours but also instil some good team spirit.

## **Useful resources**

 ACAS: [Working from Home Guidance](https://www.acas.org.uk/working-from-home)

 ROSPA: [Fitness to Drive](http://www.rospa.com/rospaweb/docs/advice-services/road-safety/employers/work-fitness.pdf)

 Mind: [How to be mentally healthy at work](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/workplace-mental-health/types-of-work/#.XZG5Y-dKi3V), [Top tips for working from home](https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/coronavirus-information-for-workplaces/mind-staff-top-tips-on-working-from-home/)

 CIPD: [Getting the most from remote working](https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/remote-working-top-tips)

 HSE: [Protecting home workers](https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm), [Driving for Work Guidance](https://www.hse.gov.uk/workplacetransport/drivingforwork.htm)

 NHS One You: [Every Mind Matters](https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/)

[A Better Medway](http://www.abettermedway.co.uk) - local health improvement advice and support for Medway

[One You Kent:](https://www.kent.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/health/one-you-kent) local health improvement advice and information for Kent

[Live Well Kent](https://livewellkent.org.uk/): Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Support

[Release the Pressure](https://www.kent.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/health/release-the-pressure): Kent and Medway wide helpline for mental health support, 24/7, 365 days a year. Call 0800 107 0160 or text “Medway” or “Kent” to 85258

 See also our Loneliness and Social Isolation: An Employer’s Guide, and Musculoskeletal Health: An Employer’s Guide available by contacting us using the details below. You can also contact us to find out more about the help and support available in setting up healthy workplaces initiatives in your organisation.

## **Contact**

For further information about health in the workplaces, or to set up healthy workplace initiatives in your organisation, please get in touch. You can contact the team by emailing workplacehealth@medway.gov.uk, calling 01634 334307 or by visiting our [website](http://www.medway.gov.uk/healthyworkplace).