

# THE HEALTHY EMPLOYEE'S SUPPORT TIPS FOR HOME WORKING

GETTING READY AND WORKING FROM HOME EFFECTIVELY



As measures to curb the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) escalate, urgent focus is being placed on organisations to enable their staff to work from home or otherwise work more flexibly.

Much of the evidence about home working points to positive benefits, including improved work-life balance and increases in job satisfaction and productivity. However, it is important to note that such evidence is based primarily on studies of individuals who have chosen to work at home.

And in many cases, they will have collaborated with their employer to ensure this arrangement is effective for both parties. Imagine now the situation where many thousands of individuals are forced to work from home, with little time to consider any adjustments that might be necessary to make this work. There are a number of potential pitfalls of this situation in relation to an employee's morale.

Here we have provided steps to help improve resilience and adaptability for homeworking and coping with the stresses and strains created in these unprecedented, challenging times.

# Resilience

Taking steps to look after your wellbeing can help you deal with pressure, and reduce the impact that stress has on your life.

This is sometimes called developing emotional resilience. Resilience is not just your ability to bounce back, but also your capacity to adapt in the face of challenging circumstances, whilst maintaining a stable mental wellbeing. Resilience isn't a personality trait - it's something that we can all take steps to achieve.

**FACE COVID** is a set of practical steps for responding effectively to the Corona crisis, using the principles of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT).

Here's a quick summary of the key steps, and in the pages that follow we'll explore them all in more depth:

## F - Focus on what's in your control

The Corona crisis can affect us in many different ways: physically, emotionally, economically, socially, and psychologically. All of us are (or soon will be) dealing with the very real challenges of this virus. And when we are facing a crisis of any sort, fear and anxiety are inevitable; they are normal, natural responses to challenging situations infused with danger and uncertainty.

It's all too easy to get lost in worrying and ruminating about all sorts of things that are out of your control: What might happen in the future; how the virus might affect you or your loved ones or your community or your country or the world - and what will happen then - and so on. And while it's completely natural for us to get lost in such worries, it's not useful or helpful.

Indeed, the more we focus on what's not in our control, the more hopeless or anxious we're likely to feel. So, the single most useful thing anyone can do in any type of crisis - Corona-related or otherwise - is to, focus on what's in your control.

You can't control what happens in the future. You can't control Coronavirus itself, the economy or how your government manages this crisis. And you can't magically control your feelings, eliminating all that perfectly natural fear and anxiety.

You can control what you do - here and now. And that matters. Because what you do - here and now - can make a huge difference to yourself, and anyone living with you, and a significant difference to the community around you.

The reality is, we all have far more control over our behaviour, than we do over our thoughts and feelings. Our aim is to take control of our behaviour - to respond effectively.

This involves both dealing with our inner world - our difficult thoughts and feelings, and our outer world - all the real problems we are facing. How do we do this? When a big storm blows up, the boats in the harbour drop anchor - because if they don't, they'll get swept out to sea. And of course, dropping anchor doesn't make the storm go away - but it can hold a boat steady in the harbour, until the storm passes.

Similarly, in an ongoing crisis, we're all going to experience 'emotional storms': Unhelpful thoughts spinning inside our head, and painful feelings whirling around our body. And if we're swept away by that storm inside us, there's nothing effective we can do. So the first practical step is to 'drop anchor', using the simple ACE formula:

**A = Acknowledge thoughts and feelings**

**C = Come back into your body**

**E = Engage in what you're doing**

Let's explore these one by one:

**A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings**

Silently and kindly acknowledge whatever is 'showing up' inside you: Thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories, sensation, urges. Take the stance of a curious scientist, observing what's going on in your inner world.

**C = Come back into your body**

Come back into and connect with your physical body. Find your own way of doing this. Try some or all of the following, or find your own methods:

- Slowly push your feet hard into the floor
- Slowly straighten up your back and spine; if sitting, sit upright and forward in your chair
- Slowly press your fingertips together
- Slowly stretch your arms or neck, shrugging your shoulders
- Slowly breathe

**Note:** You are not trying to turn away from, escape, avoid or distract yourself from what is happening in your inner world. The aim is to remain aware of your thoughts and feelings, continue to acknowledge their presence and at the same time, come back into and connect with your body, and actively move it. Why? So you can gain as much control as possible over your physical actions, even though you can't control your feelings. (Remember, F = Focus on what's in your control)

### **E = Engage in what you're doing**

Get a sense of where you are and refocus your attention on the activity you are doing. Find your own way of doing this. You could try some or all of the following suggestions, or find your own methods:

- Look around the room and notice 5 things you can see
- Notice 3 or 4 things you can hear
- Notice what you can smell or taste or sense in your nose and mouth
- Notice what you are doing
- End the exercise by giving your full attention to the task or activity at hand. (And if you don't have any meaningful activity to do, see the next 3 steps.)

### **Ideally, run through the ACE cycle slowly 3 or 4 times, to turn it into a 2- 3 minute exercise.**

NOTE: Please don't skip the A of ACE; it's so important to keep acknowledging the thoughts and feelings present, especially if they are difficult or uncomfortable. If you skip the A, this exercise will turn into a distraction technique. Dropping anchor is a very useful skill. You can use it for handling difficult thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories, urges and sensations more effectively; switching off auto-pilot and engaging in life; grounding and steadying yourself in difficult situations; disrupting rumination, obsessing and worrying; and focusing your attention on the task or activity you are doing. The better you anchor yourself in the here and now, the more control you have over your actions – which makes it a lot easier to do the next steps: **COVID**

### **C = Committed Action**

Committed action means effective action, guided by your core values; action you take because it's truly important to you; action you take even if it brings up difficult thoughts and feelings. Once you have dropped anchor, using the ACE formula, you will have a lot of control over your actions – so this makes it easier to do the things that truly matter.

Now obviously that includes all those protective measures against Corona – frequent handwashing, social distancing, and so on. But in addition to those fundamentals of effective action, consider:

1. What are simple ways to look after yourself, those you live with, and those you can realistically help? What kind, caring, supportive deeds can you do?
2. Can you say some kind words to someone in distress?
3. Can you help someone with a task or a chore?
4. Can you comfort and soothe someone who is sick? Or in the most serious of cases, nurse them and access whatever medical assistance is available?
5. If you're spending a lot more time at home through self-isolation, forced quarantine, or social distancing, what are the most effective ways to spend that time?
6. You may want to consider physical exercise to stay fit, cooking (as healthy food (as possible, given restrictions), and doing meaningful activities by yourself or with others.
7. How can you actively practice some of those mindfulness skills you've heard of but may or may not be familiar with?
8. Repeatedly throughout the day, ask yourself 'What can I do right now - no matter how small it may be - that improves life for myself, others I live with or people in my community?' And whatever the answer is – do it, and engage in it fully.

### **O = Opening up**

Opening up means making room for difficult feelings and being kind to yourself. Difficult feelings are guaranteed to arise as this crisis unfolds: Fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, guilt, loneliness, frustration, confusion, and many more. We can't stop them from arising. But we can open up and make room for them: Acknowledge they are normal, allow them to be there, and treat ourselves kindly.

Remember, self-kindness is essential if you want to cope well with this crisis – especially if you are in a caregiver role. If you've ever flown on a plane, you've heard this message: 'In event of an emergency, put on your own oxygen mask before assisting others.' Well, self-kindness is your own oxygen mask; if you need to look after others, you'll do it more effectively if you're also taking good care of yourself.

So ask yourself, 'If someone I loved was going through this experience, feeling what I am feeling – if I wanted to be kind and caring towards them, how would I treat them? How would I behave towards them? What might I say or do?' Then try treating yourself the same way.

### **V = Values**

Committed action should be guided by your core values: What do you want to stand for in the face of this crisis? What sort of person do you want to be, as you go through this? How do you want to treat yourself and others?

Your values might include love, respect, humour, patience, courage, honesty, openness, kindness, or numerous others. Look for ways to 'sprinkle' these values into your day. Let them guide and motivate your committed action.

As this crisis unfolds, there will be all sorts of obstacles in your life; goals you can't achieve, things you can't do, problems for which there are no simple solutions. But you can still live your values in a myriad of different ways, even in the face of all those challenges.

### **Consider:**

- What are kind, caring ways you can treat yourself as you go through this?
- What are kind words you can say to yourself, kind deeds you can do for yourself?
- What are kind ways you can treat others who are suffering?
- What are kind, caring ways of contributing to the wellbeing of your community?
- What can you say and do that will enable you to look back in years to come and feel proud of your response?

### **I = Identify resources**

Identify resources for assistance, support, and advice. This includes friends, family, neighbours, health professionals, emergency services. Ensure you know the emergency helpline phone numbers, including psychological help if required. Reach out to social networks. If you are able to offer support to others, let them know. You can be a resource for others, just as they can for you.

One very important aspect of this process involves finding a reliable and trustworthy source of information for updates on the crisis and guidelines for responding to it. The World Health Organisation website is the leading source of such information:

**[www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019](http://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019)**

Also check the website of the government health department. Use this information to develop your own resources: Action plans to protect yourself and others, and to prepare in advance for quarantine or emergency.

### **D = Disinfect & distance physically**

I'm sure you already know this, but it's worth repeating. Disinfect your hands regularly and practice as much social distancing as realistically possible, for the greater good of your community. We're talking about physical distancing – not cutting off emotionally. If you aren't quite sure what this means, read the latest on the recommended government websites and/or refer to the CIPD working from home survey and website. This is an important aspect of committed action, so align it deeply with your values, recognise that these are truly caring actions.

### **In Summary:**

As problems pile up in the world around you, and emotional storms rage in the world within you, come back to the steps of **FACE COVID**:

**F** = Focus on what's in your control  
**A** = Acknowledge thoughts and feelings

**C** = Come back into your body

**E** = Engage in what you're doing

**C** = Committed action

**O** = Opening up

**V** = Values

**I** = Identify resources

**D** = Disinfect & distance

**Look after yourself and others, treat yourself kindly, and remember "This too shall pass".**