

How to Handle Working from Home During the Coronavirus Outbreak

The spread of coronavirus has prompted government officials and medical experts to recommend employees work remotely for a period of time until the uptick slows. If your company's building has shut down temporarily, the idea of this work arrangement might come as a shock.

At first, the idea of working from home sounds like, well, a snow day off from school. But, keep in mind, you can't treat this as a vacation. You'll be expected to complete your work as usual, and likely keep the same hours as you would at your desk.

So, what does it take to be a successful remote employee? Here are a few tips and things to consider;

Set up a dedicated workspace. We get used to our office space and knowing exactly where everything is at our desks. When you have to work elsewhere, it can feel "off." Look around your house and find a spot that can be dedicated work space. It could be a spot in a spare room or even the basement. If possible, bring home your company laptop, desk tools and gadgets, and duplicate your office space as much as possible—it really will help with your productivity. Most importantly, set some boundaries. When the kids get home from school and they see you at your "work" desk, they need to know you're not available until your workday is done.

Stick to a schedule. Resolve to observe your typical work hours and routine. Shower, get dressed and get to work at your normal time (hey, no fighting traffic or waiting for public transportation!). Have that first cup of coffee if that's what you do, then get to work as usual. Got some downtime? Do what you'd do at the office—read an industry publication, respond to emails, visit with a co-worker. Try to avoid the temptation to do the dishes or laundry. That said, if your remote situation lasts more than a couple of weeks, you may be enough of a pro to juggle office and home tasks without messing up your work rhythm.

Dress comfortably (but not for bed). While there's no need to put on a three-piece suit or slip into heels when you work remotely, avoid the temptation to stay in your pajamas. Yes, some argue that it's imperative to dress as if you were going into work. Others say jeans and a t-shirt work fine. But everyone agrees that hanging out in a robe tends to make you feel less productive and more like watching Netflix.

Prepare to feel isolated & know how to overcome it. Anyone who works from home knows it can get a little lonely and quiet sometimes. But even when you're out of sight from co-workers and your boss, you don't have to be out of mind. Call and email key people regularly to keep in touch. Conference call lines are perfectly fine for brainstorming, discussions and planning sessions, so don't be shy about suggesting these. They're all still important and relevant when you're working from home.

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We're available to support you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Help your boss do this right. It's likely that your boss has little or no experience managing staff remotely, or even has the communication tools typically set up for this purpose. But everyone has email and a phone. Don't have a WIFI connection? You'll need one. Be proactive at keeping the boss in the loop—share your task list in the morning, and at the end of the day, send a status report.

Consider communications software. If it looks like the remote situation could last for a few weeks. Talk to your boss about purchasing and setting up some telecommuting tools for your department. There are several team communications software options like Slack, Bitrix24, and Google Teams. For virtual meetings, many offices use Zoom or Skype (these work with your laptop's internal camera or an external one if you have a desk computer.)

Commit to unplugging. If your day typically begins at 8:30 a.m., with lunch at noon and closing time at 5 p.m., observe the routine—especially the 5 p.m. part. Even experienced freelancers are prone to just working until the work is done, rather than shutting down and picking up in the morning. Schedule a post-work exercise session or some other daily evening activity that insures you'll unplug when closing time rolls around.

Above all, do all you can to normalize your new "normal." We all hope the situation gets under control again soon and we can get back to life as we know it. In the meantime, don't get discouraged. Try these tips and continue to be great at what you do—even if you're doing it from your spare bedroom.

If you feel you need more emotional support for yourself or for your family, don't hesitate to call our **Emotional Support hotline at 833-848-1764**. This is a free and confidential 24/7 mental health helpline staffed by trained and caring professionals ready to guide you to the care you need.

We'll keep this number open as long as necessary to support individuals and communities.

This is an emerging, rapidly evolving situation. For the latest information visit [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)

New Directions maintains a Business Continuity Plan that includes procedures for epidemic/pandemic illness for all New Directions service center areas. New Directions is monitoring the state of the Coronavirus outbreak through the CDC and WHO and will begin to implement internal procedures if the outbreak reaches a point deemed an epidemic and/or absenteeism affects more than 25% of the employee workforce. New Directions has the capability to re-distribute contact center calls within minutes using established protocols which designate backups for clinical care management activities. Current education and regular communication is available to members and partners through account management, social and web distribution channels.

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