COVID-19 Working Remotely and Differently – A guide

This guide provides advice and tips on how staff can work remotely and differently
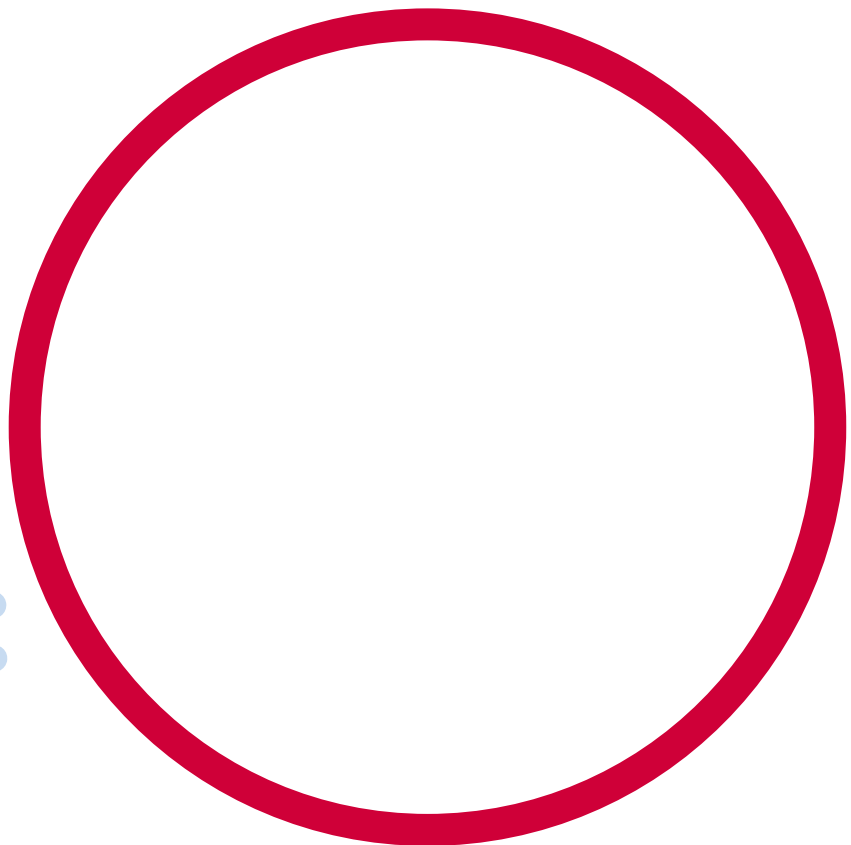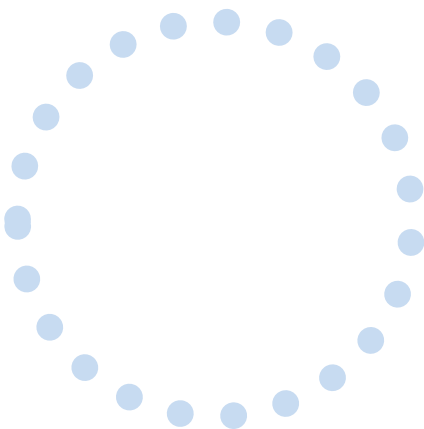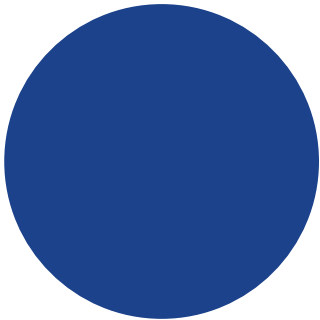
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Table of contents

Introduction

Commencing work from home practises in response to the advice from NSW Health will be a new way of working for everyone. While some staff have worked from home or other offices in line with the Department's Flexible Working Policy, the arrangements during COVID-19 will mean staff having to adapt even more to these new ways of working.

The following information will inform you and provide guidance to manage the situation as best as possible.

While it will take all of us a little while to adjust to these changes, some planning and initial setup will make it easier for everyone.

As Employees we are all responsible for:

- Establishing and maintaining an appropriate work area in our home. As a guide please refer to COVID-19 Considerations for working from home.
- Working with our managers or principals to ensure appropriate communication processes are in place, that we are available for regular contact and current contact details are provided.
- Having the appropriate equipment and systems necessary to perform our duties.
- Adhering to Department policy and procedures which still apply while working from home. We must notify our managers or principals of any incident or injury and report it to the department's **Incident Report and Support Hotline on 1800 811 523** in accordance with the Department's Incident Reporting Policy (intranet only).

Quick start guide

- The first thing you will need to do is establish your work station/area in accordance with the COVID-19 Considerations for working from home.
- Discuss start and finish times with your workplace manager or principal so everyone is clear on when to expect you to be working.
- Check that you have all the required systems and access to be able to work from home.
- Share your Outlook calendar and keep it up to date. By doing this it will help your team and colleagues know when you are available or not and make supporting each other as easy as possible.
- Make sure you are signed into Skype for Business whenever you are working.
- Adjust the Skype for Business availability status to let your team know if you are available or not: Available, Busy, Do not disturb.
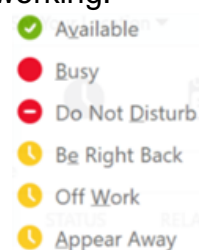
Meetings

Meetings can be conducted via Skype for Business or other virtual systems. When scheduling meetings be sure to add a Skype or virtual meeting link to all meetings to make it is as easy as possible for all attendees to join.

- Aim to dial into or join the Skype or virtual meeting just before it starts so you can organise camera, microphone settings etc.

- Always enable your camera so you can actively participate more easily and have some connection with the team and meeting attendees, especially with us all working from home.

- Make sure to follow all of the normal meeting etiquette; follow the Department's values, be positive, contribute, be present and participate.

- See the Department's intranet for some simple how to guides for Skype.

- Microsoft Teams is another way to elaborate and share information. Teams is software included as part of Microsoft Office and is designed for online collaboration. Exactly what we need. You can get familiar with it on the intranet here.

Virtual etiquette

It is important to be aware of virtual etiquette, the things you can do to help make everyone's experience a positive one.

- Leave your keyboard alone during meetings.

- Dress appropriately.

- Be aware of your surroundings and what your meeting members can see or hear within your home. For example, other household members, private spaces.

- Mute your microphone when not talking

- Speak up and announce yourself when joining the meeting.

- No food allowed. Schedule breaks and time to eat so that you are not eating while online and participating in the meeting.

- Stay seated, visible and present.

- Be aware that you are on camera. Your team can see your face and actions clearly.

Information and data security

The same rules around information technology (IT) and data security should apply whether you are working in the office or at home.

- Protecting Department critical information as well as data privacy should remain a priority.

- We should lock our computers and refrain from using personal devices to access company data.

- Vigilance is also key. Moving from corporate networks that are secured and closely monitored to often unsecured Wi-Fi home networks could create opportunities for cybercriminals.

Importance of contact and communication

It is important for us to remain in contact with our team. Your workplace manager or principal should schedule regular Skype meetings to bring the team together so that the sharing of information can take place. These meetings are an important part of your day and also an avenue of support. Ensure you participate in these meetings.

- Communication is key to support and make working from home successful.

- Advise your manager or principal of any changes in your circumstances. If you're not contactable then your manager will have concerns for your wellbeing.

- Maintain regular and open contact with your manager or principal so that they can provide appropriate support to you.

- There will be reliance more heavily on technology so if this is not a core skill of yours, which is ok, just make plans to spend some time using the internal training resources to learn some new skills. Free material and training is available via the staff portal – Linkedin Learning.

Support

Managers, principals and leaders will provide the same support that they always do. It may be that this support will be in a different form than usual, such as skype and phone. It is important to ensure they have correct contact details at all times. They will support you with work capabilities and expectations and link you to the relevant resources or support to assist you.

It is important that you raise any concerns immediately with your manager or principal and use the different contact methods of skype or phone to do so given face to face may not be possible.

The Department's EAP-Supporting You services are available for confidential counselling. Converge International, the Department's EAP provider, is currently providing video and telephone conferencing to continue providing counselling support whilst face to face restrictions remain.

If you are your staff are feeling vulnerable or have a health condition that is impacting contact the **Incident Report and Support Hotline on 1800 811 523** for advice.

Top tips

Create a schedule

Build a schedule that works for you. Think about how you want to work and when you perform your best. Make sure you build in breaks. It is easy to work too much.

Plan your work

Having a plan and knowing your priorities is just as important from home. The focus on working productively and achieving timeframes continues.

Get dressed

It might be tempting to stay in your pyjamas, wear those tracksuit pants all day, or attend all of your meetings "news reader style". There is no need to get into business attire, but dress appropriately to get you in the right frame of mind for work.

Avoid visitors

It is important to take breaks to get that coffee but don't let friends drop by and disturb your day. It will be hard to get back on track and it is not in the spirit of social distancing either.

Have a defined work space

Have a space as free from distractions as you can that is setup as per the COVID-19 Setting up a working from home environment checklist.

Be clear about your working hours

We still need to work in accordance with work core hours. However, being clear will make it easier for others to work with you. Where you can avoid it, don't go to non-work appointments in the middle of the day. This will interrupt your day and make getting things done more difficult in the long run.

Check in with team members and your workplace manager or principal

This will help you maintain a connection and continue a team culture. Use the technology that works for you and your team, such as, Skype, video calls, SMS, Microsoft Teams.

Enjoy the new ways of working

Seek out the opportunities this time will provide. No commute time means some more time for exercise, a hobby or time with the family.

Be understanding

This is a new way of working for all and we all need to put in effort to learn and establish new habits. Look after each other as you already do and help each other where you can.