



15 Ways to Support the Behavioral Health of Remote & On-site Teams



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Written in partnership with Healthy Minds Philly

Almost overnight, remote work has transformed from a niche benefit to the norm for millions of employees. And looking out for the behavioral health of your workforce – both remote and in the office – is now more important than ever.

COVID-19 impacts remote and on-site teams in all sorts of ways: the often-overwhelming cognitive load of processing the rapidly changing world in addition to work; the loss of the familiar scents, sounds, and sights of the office (even for those working on site, these may not be the same); our inner critics constantly watching us on camera in virtual meetings; the perceived need to be “on” 24/7; the cognitive dissonance of managing virtual communications; and virtual fatigue from the verbal and nonverbal demands of being “on” for video calls.

So, what can we do about all of these changes that we and our teams are experiencing? Here are some recommendations for supporting behavioral health for yourself, your team, and your organization.

1. Schedule Breaks – without regular routines to “bookend” the day, it can be hard to delineate the hours allocated to our jobs and the hours we get to spend for ourselves or with our families. Intentionally build that schedule for yourself.

2. Go Old-School – when possible, take meetings “offline” with a simple phone call. Try taking a walk during a phone conversation or even just go outside or into a different room.

3. Reproduce the Office – casual chit-chat and water-cooler conversations serve a valuable function; they help keep offices and teammates connected with each other. Using humor where and when appropriate is key to replicating office culture – it’s possible to manifest that culture through a virtual medium.

4. You Gotta Move It, Move It, Move It – change up the spot where you work, switch out your Zoom background, stretch your arms and legs, do something to break-up the potential monotony of staring at your computer screen.

5. Use & Blend the Tech – there’s been an unprecedented adoption of new technologies in the last couple months: Zoom, GoToMeeting, WebEx, Teams, just to name a few. Use the functionality these tools offer to mix-up virtual work: polls, whiteboards, breakouts, project management, instant messaging.

6. Be Patient – practice and encourage patience both with yourself and among your team. Many are new to this virtual working environment and there will be technological glitches. Be aware that everyone on your team may not feel comfortable with the new technologies of remote work. Start with yourself... demonstrate empathy and model patient behavior.

7. Understand the Body of Work – use project management tools to track who’s doing what, when, where, why, and how to grasp the scope of the work that all team members are doing. At its most simple, carefully logging your hours and the work you get done – and sharing with your supervisor – can begin to facilitate an understanding of the body of work.

8. Ensure the Organization Knows the Work You’re Doing – the visibility of the work you’re doing is more important than ever with remote teams. Using some sort of tool to facilitate that visibility helps prevent redundant efforts within your organization and allows for celebrating progress.

9. Examine your Perceptions – people put different levels of pressure on themselves. Be aware of when you may be “moving the bar.” Reimagine what success is during these unusual times. Checklists may be a great way to manage your

workload for the day, but success might look like reaching two or three items on a list of eight or more.

10. Ask & Listen – according to an April Gartner poll, 43% of employers are asking managers to collect feedback from workers in response to the epidemic. It's important to check-in with employees and hear what they have to say.

11. Ensure Equity – Thirty-four percent of employees are still working in the office. Don't forget that these teams may need special support as well as remote teams. Safety concerns and feelings of isolation or neglect can make working on-site just as new and unpredictable as remote work. Information should be shared equally across on-site and remote teams, as well as any additional perks.

12. Recognize & Reward – although monetary rewards are likely out of the question at present, look for other ways to acknowledge the work your organization or team is doing.

13. Build & Maintain Trust – don't underestimate the worth of sharing personal stories and relationship-building when it comes to creating and ensuring trust between managers and employees/teams.

14. Provide Information & Resources – Communication between leadership and employees should be consistent and include recognition of work that's being done – do not wait until "something's on fire" to connect with your organization.

15. Practice Self-Care – do not underestimate the importance of self-care. Ask yourself and encourage your teammates to ask themselves: "What do I need to do to take care of myself to be a productive employee?"

We recommend planning for the long-term while addressing the immediate needs of the short-term for your organization or team. We encourage you to think systemically to provide resources and programs that are both accessible and sustainable, while also providing information and tools now to help employees manage stress.

Trust is the key to engaging and effectively managing teams – remotely or on-site. It builds morale, creates a shared sense of purpose, and fosters commitment to your organization. Perhaps most importantly, trust between leadership and employees lays the foundation for a psychologically safe workplace.