

Kiwis' Mental Health and Well-being During Lockdown!

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This year the theme for Mental Health Awareness is to “**Take time to kōrero/mā te kōrero, ka ora**”. The focus is on connecting with people (even at a distance) and making conversations about their wellbeing and mental health. Kiwis are hard-working and driven to achieve success, however, a failure to take care of their mental health can prevent them from achieving their full potential.

As we navigate through the challenges of Covid-19, maintaining your mental health while working is a lot like staying physically fit; it requires a little personal effort each day.

What can employers do to support their employees? With remote working, it is more vital than ever for employers to encourage regular communication with employees. Listed below are some guidelines for managers to support their employees in staying connected:

Staying connected with meeting tools: the use of virtual meeting options such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, JoinMe, or Webex for regular check-ins will allow everyone to connect and not feel isolated.



Identify the impact of isolation: remote working can cause employees to feel isolated. It is important to routinely check in with the team to see how they are doing.

Loneliness can be a symptom of mental health issues such as depression. Thus, it is important to be aware of substantial changes you may see in your team member's personalities as it may be an indication they are struggling.

Be available and show empathy: Make sure to be available to answer questions and reassure them about issues that might come up while working. Ensure that you understand that your employees may feel anxious and overwhelmed during Covid. Making yourself available will help ease employee anxiety.

Boost online training: Remote working is a great time to encourage staff to sharpen their skills with virtual training. It acts as a distraction to help employees focus on learning as opposed to other issues. If you don't have the budget to invest in training, [Small Business Digital Boost](#) skills and training is part of a wider \$20 million Government incentive to help raise the digital skills of businesses during Covid.

Adjust policies: To reduce stress on the employees be generous in updating policies in reaction to the pandemic. For example, you may need to be flexible and update the working from home policy. While doing so, you may need to consider the good faith obligation to consult before making changes to any working practices.

Check-in with EAP: Check in with your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to confirm their availability and to organise support for employees. It is essential that EAP is available to employees for health support if required. Ensure to include all relevant links and contact details for EAP when communicating with employees. If this option does not suit, inform employee **to free call or text 1737**, New Zealand's 24/7 mental health helpline, where they can liaise with a counsellor at any time.