

Tips for working from home during Alert Level 4

As we all settle into a new “normal” during NZ’s Alert Level 4, we are being presented with a variety of unusual challenges. One of these is how to work effectively from home. Achieving a clear distinction between work and home life is often something people talk about. Right now, it has suddenly become a reality for us all.

Here are some things we can do to keep a healthy separation between work and home intact:

1) Get dressed, shower, brush your hair, shave - take care of yourself

It sounds simple – but it is crucial. Although it is tempting to stay in your PJs all day, doing this will only make you become slower to start and be less productive overall.

Don’t underestimate the power of putting on clothes. Remember, they should be suitable for public viewing as you will still be having meetings with your teams via Skype/Microsoft Teams etc – everyone can see you!

Making yourself get dressed is important because it makes you feel “human”, confident and work ready for the coming day - these things are especially important when the breakdown of our everyday routines may make us feel like we are cut off from the real world.

2) Have a designated workspace

One of the biggest challenges of working remotely is keeping your work and home life separate. Your workspace doesn’t have to be a separate room at all, but it should feel as separate from the rest of your home as much as possible. If it is the kitchen table, then claim the table for the duration.

Make sure your workspace is comfortable, has good lighting and ventilation. Going into a separate workspace helps you mentally start work at the beginning of the day. In the same way that leaving your workspace will help you switch off at the end of the day. If you are going to be at your computer for a large chunk of the day refer to the ‘Working from home ergonomic checklist’ below.

3) Keep clearly defined working hours

Be clear about when you are working and when you are not. When you have finished work for the day it is important to make a conscious decision to fully disconnect. Otherwise your work productivity will suffer, and your home and family life may take a hit as well.

Hold yourself accountable, but also recognise when enough is enough. It is so easy to keep on working when at home and not take breaks. You need to stop to eat and keep hydrated. If you are an early starter, it helps to get yourself into work mode first thing and complete your daily tasks before you get distracted by home/family life going on around you. If you get an early start you will get a sense of accomplishment which frees you up for leisure time later in the day.

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3) Keep clearly defined working hours (cont)

Equally, for those night owls amongst us, if you want to work into the evening to balance the hours during the day that is fine, but remember to hold yourself accountable – you need to ensure you are putting work away, relaxing and recharging so you are ready to start the next day.

4) Communication

Communication is absolutely essential when working from home. We are all on this journey together and facing unusual challenges along the way – we all “get it”. Use email, phone calls, texts, video chats etc – we are so lucky to have an abundance of technological platforms, so use them to stay social.

Remember to be respectful and considerate with your communication. Keep others informed of your availability and keep in touch. We want to keep in touch with you throughout this lockdown period – even if you are not working your usual job or the exact same hours as when you were on site. Please remember to check emails and the intranet regularly and respond to messages from your manager.

5) Socialising is still important

Some of the casual social interactions you are used to having throughout the day in the office or in programme are now gone. When we work from home, we don't have the small talk and random happenings that help give the day variety. We can combat this by talking with your Y team members throughout the day. Keep up the interactions even though they are now at a distance. Additionally, don't just catch up about work – really check in with your team. Working from home can be very isolating and combined with a lot of feelings of anxiousness and uncertainty means we need our team more than ever. Reach out, connect and take care of one another.

6) Be Kind - Be Patient - Stay Positive

With so much going on all things COVID-19 related, the negative headlines can have a psychological impact on everyone. As Jacinda says, the best thing we can do for ourselves and our loved ones is be kind to each other. Patience and tolerance are key factors in staying positive and healthy. The more effort we put in to keep in touch, the more we can avoid the sense of isolation, anxiety or depression.

7) Look after your own wellbeing

The number one message from the NZ Mental Health Foundation and Director General of Health is that we will all get through this by working together and doing what is right for ourselves and others. Don't let physical distance prevent you from connecting with people who make you feel safe and loved. It is the most important thing you can do to look after your mental health and the mental health of people around you.