The COVID-19 pandemic is an evolving situation that has already required major changes to the way we live and work. As part of social distancing measures, much of the Australian workforce has now shifted to a 'Work from Home' (WFH) model.

In this unprecedented period of uncertainty, remote work and social distancing, a sense of isolation or hopelessness can take a significant toll on the way that employees think, feel, and therefore behave. Such mental health stressors could require some extra support. This additional support is also an important driver of protecting the focus, coordination, and performance of your team during this time.

It is recommended that managers who are leading teams with remotely located employees:

- Schedule regular team-wide meetings to ensure a common operating picture is maintained amongst your team members.

- Make daily individual contact with each employee to serve as a welfare and productivity monitoring touch point; daily contact also helps to sustain a continuous, productive working relationship

- Create and maintain a log to track and record this daily individual contact

- Consult with your employees to set tasks and tasks deadlines; this will help to maintain an employee's sense of purpose and direction

- Provide guidance and support to ensure employees have set up an optimal home workstation

Below are some practical tips that employers and team managers can use to monitor and assist how their employees are coping;

- **Stay connected**. Keep in touch via phone, video conferencing and online platforms. Consider routinely checking in with others – e.g. scheduling activities such as sharing a virtual lunch with a colleague or the wider team.

- **Give direction**. Task employees and monitor their progress to ensure they maintain a sustainable level of business, productivity, and engagement.

- **Recognise the signs**. Be aware of shifts in behaviour or communication style, such as a flat tone of voice, a loss of focus, and a lack of participation or engagement in meetings and one on one check ins. Others may show signs of feeling overwhelmed, scared, confused, impatient, or angry.

- **Help others to focus on what they can control**. Be positive and encourage self-care. Encourage employees to set boundaries around their WFH routine to ensure a work/ life balance is maintained. Talk through a daily routine that supports healthy habits, such as getting enough sleep, eating well and engaging in relaxing activities.

- **Show support and acknowledge their experience**. Be accepting and non-judgemental when an employee expresses frustration with the current remote work arrangements. Take the time to listen and inquire about what would help them feel more supported.

- **Know your boundaries** and when to seek outside support. If you believe a team member may require professional support, talk to them about the services available inside your organisation. You may wish to first discuss how to best approach this discussion with your own manager, or a HR professional within your organisation. You could also suggest the helpful services listed below.

- **Develop an 'Unplanned Absence' strategy** Develop a list of actions that can be taken when an employee or colleague has an unexplained absence or is unable to be contacted. Ensure that you have current contact information for each employee, noting that an employee may have chosen to socially distance themselves in a location other than their place of residence.

- **Turn it around**. Don't forget that the resilience of the leader becomes the default level of resilience within the team; be sure to apply the above advice to yourself.

To further evaluate an employee's wellbeing, find a good time to discuss this with them. Be mindful that this may be a conversation that they may not wish for others in their household to overhear.

Remember, though we may be socially distanced, we can still connect meaningfully over technology platforms. The below table provides points to consider when assessing an employee's welfare.

Signs an Employee is coping	Action
Do they sound well and are they staying socially connected?	Keep checking in and stay connected.
Are they able to largely maintain focus, engagement, and a work/ life balance?	
Signs an Employee requires additional support	**Action**
Do they sound sad, overly anxious, overwhelmed, angry or preoccupied?	Reach out and offer other supports if needed - trusted colleague or refer to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
Do they seem unable to concentrate, less engaged or withdrawn?	
Signs an Employee requires professional support	**Action**
Are they acting differently and/or sound like they are not themselves?	Ask if they need some support. Encourage professional help from their GP, counsellor, psychologist, EAP or other services.
Do they seem excessively distressed, anxious, hopeless and/or indicating they feel nothing will improve?	

Additional Resources

Looking after your mental health - https://www.commerce.wa.gov.au