

Taking care of team mental health and wellbeing during COVID 19



COVID-19 has affected us all and never before has workplace mental health and wellbeing been more important. The physical health crisis has destabilised workplaces and home lives, social networks, usual routines and plans we had in place. For many who have retained their employment, work can provide a distraction, a sense of normality, security and some sense of plans for the future. These aspects of work can help individuals find a safe port amid a storm. Workplaces with a focus on wellbeing provide an accessible and valuable space for employees to seek help and in turn provide collegiate support to fellow team members.

At this time, team wellbeing will be at top of mind for good managers and leaders. The pandemic and the accompanying stressors will remain with the world for a long period of time, so it is important to develop wellbeing management actions that are regular and sustainable. Additionally, and undoubtedly, the mental health and wellbeing of your employees will be one of the keys to business continuity and commercial success now and in the future.

So how can you manage workplace wellbeing in the age of COVID 19? There are three fundamental points:

- 1.** Provide leadership by acknowledging the challenges and talking and communicating to develop a common, factual and calm understanding.
- 2.** Encourage and support employee self-care and wellbeing. Staying well and building resilience is a form of protection and will help prevent mental health and wellbeing challenges.
- 3.** Educate and encourage employees to reach out for help when needed. Make sure they know what's available before they need it and that their confidentiality will be respected.

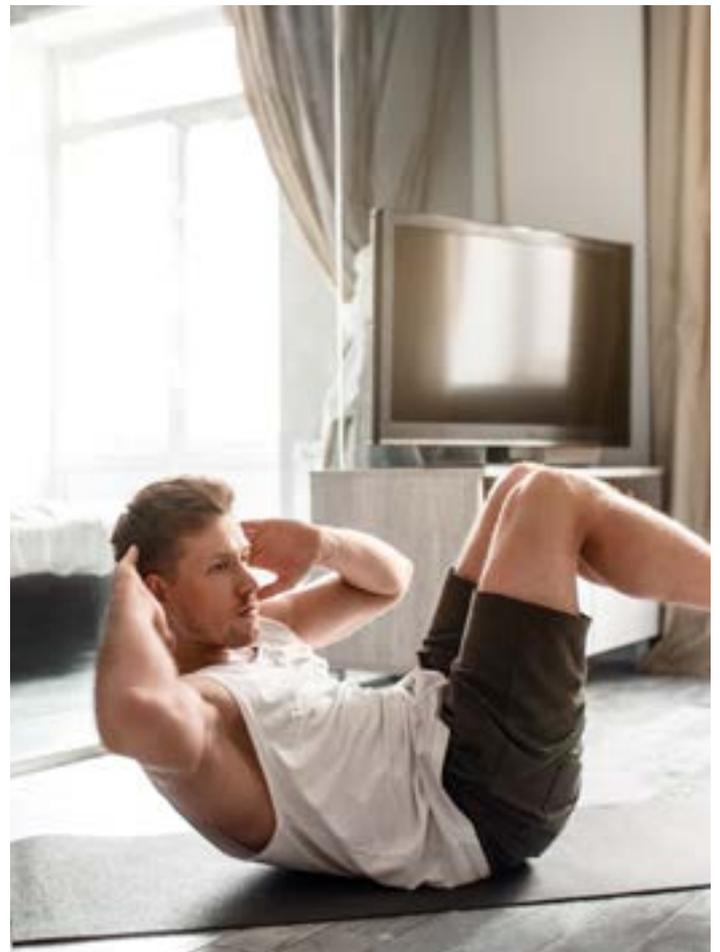
As individuals, we are in charge of our own wellbeing and the single most important person to influence our health. So, helping employees to manage their own wellbeing is key to success.

Taking care of team mental health and wellbeing during COVID 19 - Continued

Following are some tips for managers – it is important to get started doing these things now. Reacting to a situation often results in many stumbles, so being pre-prepared and pre-communicating is the best way to go.

- ➔ Be frank about the fact that we are living in stressful times and that the changes we are experiencing are different and challenging for all of us. Make the point that we all need to look out for each other as a team and accept that people will react differently to world events.
- ➔ Be mindful, compassionate and sensitive to how people in your team are coping.
- ➔ Keep it real, acknowledge the stress of the world now and the importance of working together and staying well. If you need to spend a little time at each meeting talking about the external world situation, do so by discussing facts but then move on.
- ➔ Obtain and utilise information from reliable outlets such as Australian Government sources. Discourage excessive media exposure. Avoid and discourage conversations that centre around negative speculation, discourage continued talk about circumstances that are not connected to the people in your workplace and negative situations that you have no control over.
- ➔ Accept that as a manager you have the potential to have a great influence on your employees, however, you are not a trained counsellor and it is incredibly stressful to try to take the brunt. Give yourself a break and realise that the best thing you can do is be compassionate and help your employees seek professional assistance when they need it.
- ➔ Tell your team what practical services or resources you have for them and where they can find them. If you provide counselling, make sure you tell them the details and where they can find the information again later. Most people will think they don't need that information right now, but if they do later, it is best that they know where to get the information rather than having to ask. Luemo [Reaching Out for Help](#) has practical details to help you with this.

- ➔ Make mental health and wellbeing an item on your meeting agenda on a regular basis and have something pre prepared and interesting to talk about – for example, share some information on wellbeing while working at home, encourage employees to read the Luemo resources to [Stay Well and Build Resilience](#). You could even take on the [Luemo Wellbeing Scorecard Challenge](#).
- ➔ Have a mental health and wellbeing program and plan. A wellbeing program and plan will vary greatly from workplace to workplace, but the key point is that you need one. If you have not yet put a structured plan together you can follow the [Luemo 10 Step Guide to building and leading your workplace wellbeing culture](#).
- ➔ Proactively ensure employees know which individual to approach if they need to speak to someone internally and have them know that that person will handle their information confidentially.



Taking care of team mental health and wellbeing during COVID 19 - Continued

Working from home adds a new layer of complexity and challenge for individuals and workplaces. Remote working may be a long-term reality for many employees, and some workplaces and employers may continue to utilise a workforce set up at home. Given this, it is important that arrangements and expectations for remote working are sustainable over the longer term. Here are some tips:

- Have your employees set up properly with computer, broadband etc. Appreciate it may take some time to sort out a workspace and encourage them to find a semi-permanent place in a quiet area of their home.
- Understand and acknowledge that employees may have a partner who is also working from home and they may have children who are remote schooling. Accept that the situation will be different for each employee with different difficulties faced by each person.
- Set new and realistic expectations about productivity. Accept that things are not necessarily going to be the same.
- Understand that as a manager you are going to spend some extra time, particularly in the beginning, with your employees to help them make the adjustment to working from home. Some might struggle – you might too. Acknowledge this and continue to work steadily.
- Your employees will take their cues from you – remember this and act accordingly. If you are well organised, upbeat and open to new ways of working, your team will be too.
- Have remote counselling available. If you or your employees are finding it difficult to focus on work and the Covid 19 situation is causing stress and overshadowing life, it is time to reach out for professional help.
- You may find that you need to go back to basics. Make a team commitment to get up at normal time every day, shower, eat breakfast and put on clean clothes. Encourage employees to have a usual routine and set some regular times for having work completed.

- Have regular team catch up times and regular one on one meeting times. As a manager, have an agenda so that the time is spent productively, and you are not just chatting. Introduce training sessions, review sessions, do some forward planning, ask your team for ideas too.
- Encourage team members to keep up their social connections outside of work. Remind them to talk to their family and friends.

The mental health and wellbeing of your employees will be one of the keys to business continuity and commercial success now and in the future. The investment and management attention will be a valuable tool in moving through the pandemic and ongoing success.

