

# How to support your staff during COVID-19

## Particularly those struggling with stress and other emotions



### What this fact sheet covers:

- How to identify if your staff are feeling overwhelmed
- Useful online resources & tools

COVID-19 has created dramatic changes in the workplace.

Depending on your organisation, you and your team may now be working remotely, running staggered rosters, or working modified duties on site.

These changes, coupled with the ongoing health and economic threat of COVID-19, can have a significant impact on employee wellbeing. As a manager, it's important to think about how to support your staff, particularly those struggling with stress and other emotions.

Here's what you can do.

### Maintain regular catch-ups with your team

Regular team catch-ups are an excellent starting point for maintaining a sense of connection with your team. While your current work setup may make these catch-ups trickier to implement than normal, they're worth scheduling.

"Having regular contact from early on means you build up a rapport, you get to understand your staff, your team, and then you're more in tune to picking up those little changes that may indicate that someone's having a particularly hard time," says Dr Aimee Gayed, a psychologist and Postdoctoral Research Fellow in workplace mental health at Black Dog Institute.

### Look out for signs of struggle

When it comes to assessing how employees are coping, keep an eye out for changes in demeanour.

Body language (if you're still seeing staff in person) can be a fairly reliable indicator of mood, as can the underlying tone of emails and phone calls and the speed at which employees respond.

Changes in attitude towards work and changes in productivity can also be signs that something isn't right, although Gayed cautions that some productivity fluctuations are likely given that almost everyone is dealing with significant workplace changes.



“Judging by work output alone may not be as reliable as it would be in a normal setting, and reassuring staff that changes in productivity at this time are normal can help reduce the pressure on them, but if it’s coupled with other signs, it’s worth following up,” she says.

“For example, if a staff member has a change in mood and also seems to be struggling with workload, that’s a fair enough reason for a manager to be able to say, ‘How’s it going at home? Is there anything else I can do or someone else in the team can do to help reduce the pressure at this point in time?’”

## Set up regular 1:1 meetings with staff you’re concerned about

If you’re getting a sense that someone in your team needs support, make sure you follow up, preferably in a private setting or on a 1:1 phone/video meeting where you can encourage them to speak openly about their feelings

“Regular check-ins in a one-on-one capacity from early on is recommended and will make these discussions easier,” Gayed says.

Be conscious of asking open-ended questions (such as ‘Tell me about the new remote working arrangement – how is it working out for you?’) rather than queries with a yes/no answer – this will help you better gauge what might be going on.

## Provide support, both in and beyond the workplace

If one of your employees is struggling, be responsive. Where possible, approve requests for leave or consider arranging modified duties that will reduce the immediate pressure while enabling the staff member to stay connected to work.

If they need more structured support, connect them to your employee assistance program (if you have one) or to other high-quality mental health resources and services external to your organisation – it’s not your job to try and counsel them yourself but it is part of your role as manager to support them.

“Managers should be aware of the support services available from within their organisation, as well as in the public domain, so they can promote and facilitate help-seeking for their employees,” Gayed says.

Whatever arrangements you end up making, don’t leave the conversation there – schedule the next follow-up session before ending your catch-up so you can continue checking in, even if your staff member is on leave.

## Keep an eye on your own mental health

As a manager, it’s easy to get distracted by meeting the needs of those around you while forgetting about your own, but it’s important to take the time to check in with your own feelings and make sure you’re still on track.

Maintain regular catch-ups with your own manager or a trusted colleague who has some insights into your professional situation, and be frank about the challenges you’re experiencing both at and beyond work.

Sharing your experiences with your team can also be beneficial – acknowledging the difficulties you are experiencing with this new arrangement can help staff feel more comfortable speaking to you about their difficulties early on and can also help you clarify your own feelings.

If you need extra support, use the channels available to you both in and beyond your workplace.



“Being in tune with changes in your own behaviour or ability to manage workload is important,” Gayed says.

“The resources that you would hopefully be across for your employees are also relevant for you.”

## Helpful online tools and resources

myCompass

[www.mycompass.org.au](http://www.mycompass.org.au)

Black Dog Institute Online Clinic

[onlineclinic.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://onlineclinic.blackdoginstitute.org.au)

This Way Up

[thiswayup.org.au](http://thiswayup.org.au)

MindSpot

[mindspot.org.au](http://mindspot.org.au)

This document may be freely downloaded and distributed on condition no change is made to the content. The information in this document is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Not to be used for commercial purposes and not to be hosted electronically outside of the Black Dog Institute website.

For information: [blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://blackdoginstitute.org.au)



[blackdoginst](http://blackdoginst)



[@blackdoginst](https://twitter.com/blackdoginst)



[/BlackDogInst](https://www.youtube.com/BlackDogInst)

**Written by:**

Dr Aimee Gayed,  
Psychologist and Postdoctoral Research Fellow in workplace mental health  
at Black Dog Institute

**Creating a mentally healthier world**



**Black Dog  
Institute**