

The Employer's Guide to Your Team's Mental Health During COVID-19

Remember that whatever you're feeling right now, your workers probably are too.

If your employees are working with the public, that can cause anxiety and fear, especially if customers are panicked. Be particularly empathetic with these heroes right now. Service jobs like cashiers, custodians, customer service, pharmacists, and nurses don't get enough credit - and they are the ones keeping our world running right now. Let them know that you see that and understand that working with the public is daunting right now.

If your employees are working from home, focus on your human resources more than the work itself. First and foremost, your staff are people. Let your team know you see the struggles and understand things will be difficult for everyone. Remember that some employees working from home will struggle with the isolation, which can lead to - or exacerbate - depression.

Whether your staff are working from home or on the front lines, remember that any anxiety, fear, stress, or overwhelm you're experiencing - they're likely feeling the same. It's a challenging time for everyone, so patience and empathy will go a long way. Recognize that you're dealing with human beings and need to meet them on that level as their leader.

This is not business-as-usual.

Don't expect the same volume of work from your staff that you normally get. These are extraordinary times and society has taken extraordinary measures in response. This means that not everyone will be able to work at 100% remotely, especially if your staff suddenly have kids at home who would normally be at school. Be compassionate, understanding, and accommodating.

Ways to nurture your team's mental health

- **If you normally have face-to-face meetings, try to keep those schedules as much as possible.** Get creative - Zoom, Slack, and FaceTime can all be useful during this time. Regular social connection is essential for mental health; and for many of us, we've suddenly lost our built-in social interactions.
- **Create virtual opportunities for your team to connect.** Set up video coffee breaks, lunches, or after-work drinks that are focused on connecting as a team, not the work.
- **Be flexible with your team and their schedules.** We're all trying to find a new rhythm in this bizarre reality. Particularly for your staff with kids at home, understand that their hours may fluctuate irregularly and that they may be often interrupted during video calls. Trust that they're doing their best and make the best of the situation.
- **Make a conscious effort to check in with your staff individually at least once a week.** This isn't hard to do - send a quick email or Slack message and ask them how they're doing. Encourage honest answers. If you don't know how to respond, something like, *"I don't know what to say, but I'm sorry that you're feeling this way. Life is really hard right now, but we're all in this together and we will get through it,"* is a good start.
- **Make your team aware of the mental health resources available to them.** We've got ideas [here](#) on how to create joy in our free time during this period, [how to deal with anxiety related to COVID-19](#), and [how to take good care of your mental health](#). If your staff need more, remind them to [reach out for professional support](#). Be careful not to imply that reaching out for professional help indicates weakness in some way.
- **Remind your team of their virtual healthcare options.** All British Columbians are able to easily access a doctor online via [MediMapVirtual](#).
- **Prepare to play some of the collective workload by ear.** We're all together in this period of adjustment. Be flexible as your team gets used to their new reality and be prepared to adjust deadlines and workloads.

Finally, before you can take care of others, you need to take care of yourself. Your ability to lead others successfully necessitates that you continuously meet your own needs. The true mark of a good leader isn't a title or a CV, it's the ability to set an example. Successful leadership is successful modelling, so make sure you walk the walk and ask for what you need.