

Staying Connected to Colleagues when Some or all are Remote

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At a glance

- We are social beings so working from home can lead to feelings of isolation that impact wellbeing and work.
- Some simple ideas and tools can recreate workplace interactions virtually and make people feel more connected with colleagues and friends
- If you feel isolated working from home, you are not alone, and there is plenty of help to get you back on track

Feelings of isolation at home are normal

Aristotle said it best. “Man is, by nature, a social animal.” We are wired to want to connect, to share our thoughts and experiences with others. In fact, neuroscientists are only now learning more about the “social brain” – synchronous brain activity between two or more people that happens when we come together, enabling us do things we could never achieve individually. In short, we are meant to live, socialize and work together. But when we work from home, cut off from colleagues for long periods of time, what can at first seem fun, can often lead to feelings of isolation that may affect our wellbeing and work performance.

Recreating the interactions of the workplace virtually

In the workplace we often arrive to our jobs and leave at similar times. We have countless planned and unplanned interactions every day. In the elevator, the line for a salad at lunch, scheduled meetings, impromptu birthday cake celebrations in the break room and chats with co-workers who stop by our work stations. The workplace is a constant hive of social connections and collaborative working.

Many people miss those social connections when working from home. To combat feelings of disconnectedness, isolation and even loneliness during work from home, here are some ideas to stay connected with coworkers and work friends:

- **Turn the Video ON** – during Zoom, Facetime or other video calls and meetings encourage your coworkers turn on their computer, tablet or phone cameras. That visual contact is important.
- **Make commute time communicate time** –when we’re not commuting 15-, 30- or more minutes twice a day, there’s more time in your workday that you can use intentionally to connect with colleagues. Try scheduling a virtual 15-minute coffee catch up with a work friend in the morning or even a post-work happy hour glass of wine once a week. Step away from your desk or dining room table too and take your colleague with you onto the deck to make the time feel more special and a break from work talk.
- **Use tech tools to work and play together** – there are all kinds of efficiency apps and co-working software available for remote teams to share files and collaborate on documents and reports. But other tools are designed to *feel* more like a conversation or chatter with colleagues. Explore social tools that might fit with your work-group. Try dedicating a social channel to “Weekend Catch Up”, “News from the Homefront” or even shared pics of pets and kids to mimic the sharing of little tidbits of colleagues’ lives we all receive at work. Keep channels open if it’s not too distracting, and enjoy the closest thing to impromptu workplace conversations.
- **Bring other workplace connections online** – virtual work connections don’t just need to be all about meetings or chat either. Make sure to use remote work tools at your disposal to continue the professional development and admin needs of yourself and your team. Mentoring of new and young colleagues. Weekly check in’s with direct reports or your boss. Online brainstorm and ideation sessions. These are all excellent ways to keep yourself and your co-workers connected and engaged in all kinds of ways from wherever you are.
- **Social sharing** – there are hundreds of ideas to develop shared interests with your co-workers that offer other ways to connect, things to talk about and that can spark new enthusiasm, passion and debate even when you’re not sharing the same lunch table. Plan to listen a famous true crime or mystery podcast and connect to discuss after, join

the same Facebook groups to extend your virtual circle or new LinkedIn discussion groups for work or personal interests, organize a team-or companywide book club, and look for fun occasional surprise get togethers like “pet first Fridays” where pets join the weekly meeting zoom call.

Where to get help when you do feel isolated

A recent [survey](#) by Totaljobs reports 74% of young workers in the United Kingdom have experienced some form of loneliness while working from home.. So if you’ve found yourself with feelings of isolation or anxiety, know it's a common problem that many people face. If you are able, talk with a supportive manager or your HR representative at work and let them know what’s going on. Often there are programs and protocols in place to help.

If feelings last more than a few days consider speaking with your doctor to see if treatment might be a good idea, or visit www.mind.org.uk for all kinds of helpful information, resources and contacts for support and counselling should you need it. Remember, just because you’re *working* alone, doesn’t mean you *are* alone. Take action now to make sure your home/work routine is keeping you connected. You’ll be glad you did.