

Leading through Uncertainty – Conversations to Support Your Team’s Wellbeing

What is this guide?	
<p>The COVID-19 is an unprecedented situation and supporting colleague wellbeing is more important than ever. New guidance, resources, tools, hints and tips to support our wellbeing are appearing every day. We will be using THRIVE and the Orb to share the best of these with you, but to give you some pointers and save you time, this document summarises key considerations for you as a leader to support your team’s wellbeing during these challenging and uncertain times. Complement this guidance with our new wellbeing check-in tools for your 1:1 and team conversations.</p>	
Helping your team establish healthy routines	
Potential wellbeing challenges for colleagues	What can I do as a manager?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key workers working in increasingly difficult circumstances and increased risk of infection. • Anxiety about adjusting to new ways of working for an uncertain time period • May already be struggling due to an issue impacting on mental health • Challenges in maintaining a healthy work/life balance • Challenges in balancing childcare and other family responsibilities • Preparing for or experiencing self-isolation • Information overload • Concerns and worries for the health of family members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to the concerns of your team and ensure you have done all you can to meet their needs • Consider the diversity of your team and how they may adjust differently to sudden change and uncertainty • Give space for a conversation about how your team member is structuring their day so that it supports their physical and mental wellbeing • Encourage self-care and emphasise that managing mental wellbeing during this time is as important as managing physical health. • Encourage team members to look after their energy levels and to pace themselves – this is a marathon not a sprint • Encourage team members to create a home contingency plan for self-isolation • Reassure team members that its ok not to feel ok. This is an unprecedented situation and its normal to experience difficult emotions as we adjust • Set clear expectations of working hours so that colleague don’t feel pressured to be available beyond those times. • Watch out for individuals becoming over-tired (especially key workers) and encourage employees to take regular breaks and finish their shifts on time • Let your colleagues know that there is guidance available for them to help create healthy routines that support their mental health during these uncertain times

Providing regular supportive conversations

Potential wellbeing challenges for colleagues

- May feel overwhelmed by new responsibilities, amount of existing responsibilities or decision making
- May feel unclear on their role and how they are contributing to the bigger picture
- Diversity of responses – some colleagues may be experiencing increased distress, worry and anxiety whereas others may be on ‘overdrive’ and others may be well adjusted to their new situation
- Energy reserves depleting as time goes on
- Increased concern for friends and family who may be or who become affected
- Distress due to emotional impact of work for key workers

What can I do as a manager?

- Create a spirit of ‘checking in’ with your team not ‘checking-on’ – keep a focus on the whole person, not just on the work they are doing
- Be mindful that individuals may be more affected by ongoing events than others and may require more frequent contact
- Give people an opportunity to share if they’re struggling. A simple “how are you?” is powerful when asked sincerely and often just saying it out loud is helpful for someone feeling worried or overwhelmed
- Uncertainty leads to anxiety so keep lines of communication open and clear
- For those experiencing difficult emotions, provide reassurance that it is normal to be feeling this way in the current situation. Stress, anxiety and overwhelm are by no means a reflection that someone cannot do their job or that they are weak.
- Encourage colleagues to use stress-management techniques that they have used in the past to get through difficult times (e.g. mindfulness, exercise, relaxation techniques)
- Help them focus on what is in their control – feeling helpful and purposeful can help improve mood and reduce anxiety
- Be clear on the mental health and wellbeing support available to colleagues so that you can signpost them to the best resource (see: <https://orb.edinburgh.gov.uk/employee-wellbeing>)

Creating team connections and support

Potential wellbeing challenges for colleagues

- Feeling isolated from other team members and wider support network
 - Feeling alone when making difficult decisions
 - Reduced social interaction with team members
 - Some team members may want more social contact than others. Some may feel overwhelmed by the range of digital forums they are invited to participate in.
- Increased workload pressures for key workers leading to reduced team conversations (at the time they are most needed)

What can I do as a manager?

- Create opportunities for colleagues to keep connected with each other e.g. via virtual team meetings, morning huddles, end of shift team chats
- For key workers, look for ways to build time into shifts for staff to 'off-load'– even 5 minutes to share what has gone well and what has been challenging that day can make a big difference
- Create new norms with your team by asking some good questions upfront e.g. how often do we want to meet? How will we create balance in our meetings so there is space for informal chat and laughter as well as a focus on our work? What digital platforms could we use?
- Celebrate team successes and share appreciation for each person's contribution
- Consider a buddying system or other ways for staff to support each other, especially for new or inexperienced staff
- Ensure colleagues do not feel obliged to participate in digital forums outwith their normal working hours.
- Learn and adapt as you go. Keep asking team members what is and isn't working for them and what their own ideas are.