

# A GUIDE TO MANAGING AND SUPPORTING REMOTE WORKERS

Guidance for line  
managers

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The registered charity champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has more than 150,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

# Introduction to the line manager support materials

Managers play a vital role in determining the health, wellbeing and engagement of their team. They also play an essential part in managing particular people management issues that arise in their team, such as bereavement, conflict, sickness absence and mental health problems, which can have a negative impact on employee health, wellbeing and engagement if not well managed.

CIPD research identified five key behavioural areas that are important for line managers to support the health, wellbeing and engagement of those who work for them:



Being open, fair and consistent



Handling conflict and people management issues



Providing knowledge, clarity and guidance



Building and sustaining relationships



Supporting development

A line manager's behaviour and the culture they create in their team is the biggest influence on an employee's work experience. Capability in these five behavioural areas, underpinned by an attitude of care, respect, compassion, wisdom and kindness, is vital for line managers to manage the health, wellbeing and engagement of their team. Such capability will also provide the foundation for line managers to manage particular people management issues and will enable managers to take a positive approach, recognise employee needs in these situations and manage them in ways that are sensitive, supportive and inclusive.

The CIPD has created a range of [support materials](#) to help you adopt a management approach that supports good health, wellbeing and engagement in your team by helping you explore and develop your management capability. Designed for anyone who manages people, the guidance and exercises are quick and easy to use. They can help you save time and get better results by managing people well – all of which is good for your own wellbeing as well as that of your team.

To build on these resources, the CIPD has also created a series of guides focusing on specific areas of people management that aim to support managers in dealing with particular people management issues. Each of these guides provides practical information and advice relevant to that particular people management issue, as well as linking it to the approach covered in the support materials. The intention is that managers use the five key behavioural areas as the basis for managing all the issues, and draw on specific relevant behaviours from within the framework to help with the particular issue in question. Look out for the icons to understand which of the behaviours is particularly relevant to the issues being discussed. You can then refer back to the [exercises](#) to develop these behaviours further.

## Introduction to this guide

Remote working (meaning workers who spend at least part of their working week working away from a main location, for example on client sites, working from home or working in other non-office locations) was already well established prior to 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic has seen an explosion in the number of people working remotely, particularly working from home. The initial crisis phase of the pandemic saw an abrupt move of employees from office-based environments to homeworking and, as pandemic-related restrictions become extended, remote working arrangements are becoming more established. In the longer term, it seems likely that remote working arrangements put in place during the pandemic will be made more permanent or converted into hybrid arrangements involving remote working at least some of the time. This means that organisations, managers and employees need to find ways to make remote working sustainable, healthy and effective.

As a manager, you may be managing remote workers for the first time or you may have more people in your team working remotely (or working remotely more of the time) than you did before. It is therefore essential you reflect on your own management style and how you provide support to remote workers.

Your role as the line manager of remote workers is vital in helping ensure that they remain healthy, engaged and productive. This guide provides some tips on how to support employees who are working remotely, both in the short term and in the longer term, and points to the management behaviours that are particularly important for different aspects of this.

## Why is it important for line managers to consider how they manage remote workers?

Managing remote workers is not totally different from managing those who are in the same physical location as you. However, it is potentially more challenging and there are some specific aspects that you need to consider. Good people management becomes even more important when you aren't meeting your team face to face.



Taking the time to **build and sustain good relationships** is vital, as is bringing an authentic, caring, compassionate attitude to underpin your management approach. [Exercise 5](#) offers advice on developing this behaviour.

When managing remote workers, it is particularly important to be aware of and show care for your team members' physical and psychological wellbeing and safety. All the aspects of manager behaviour covered by the support materials are pertinent to employee health and wellbeing, so they are all relevant in the context of managing remote workers.

Other essential aspects of managing remote workers include taking a consistent approach, empowering people, building trust, and ensuring clarity of communications, all of which involve being open, respectful, kind, fair and consistent and providing knowledge, clarity and guidance. It is also vital to take an individualised approach, in which you build and sustain relationships with every member of your team and understand their differing needs.



Looking after your own wellbeing and managing your own emotions, stress levels and pressures will also be essential in order that you are able both to manage other people and to role-model healthy approaches to your team. This is part of **being open, fair and consistent** and [Exercise 2](#) can be used to develop this area of behaviour.

## Managing the health and safety and wellbeing of remote workers

Employers are responsible for an employee's health, safety and welfare, both when working in the employer's premises and when working from home or elsewhere. Remote working therefore has a range of implications, from risk assessment and legal requirements to broader absence management, health and wellbeing.

You or someone from your organisation should usually conduct risk assessments of all the work activities carried out by employees, including those working from home or elsewhere, looking at risks posed by the psychological and social environment in which people are working as well as their physical work environment.

### Risk-assessing the physical work environment

Undertaking physical risk assessments of each employee's home may not be feasible. If the risks of working from home have been deemed lower than being at work, you may decide that homeworking risk assessments (particularly for short periods of homeworking) can be conducted using electronic risk assessment questions and providing employees with guidance to follow at home. However, it is important to bear in mind that, when people are forced to work at home due to circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic, their workspace may not be set up according to good health and safety practice. It is important to help people find ways to arrange their physical work environment to be as conducive as possible to healthy ergonomics, including posture, screen positioning, device usage, and so on.

### Risk-assessing for psychological and social risks

This will include areas such as demands, control/autonomy, levels of support, relationships, the individual's role, and how change is managed. [The Health and Safety Executive's management standards](#) can provide support with stress risk assessment. In a time of heightened psychological risk such as a pandemic, which brings anxiety, social isolation (or too much time with others in the household), uncertainty, fears for the future and other associated stressors, it is important to find ways of minimising and mitigating risks to psychological health and wellbeing.

### Health and safety policy

You need to make sure that remote workers are knowledgeable about health and safety and that they comply with the organisation's health and safety policy. Health and safety legislation puts some responsibility on homeworkers to ensure that they and members of the household are not endangered by work activities undertaken at home.

### Managing sickness absence and presenteeism

You may want to remind employees that they should continue to comply with the organisation's sickness absence policy and report to you (or through whatever arrangements are in place) when they are sick and unable to work. It is also important to discourage presenteeism: if a team member is unwell, encourage them to take time off and to give an update or handover on urgent work. As a manager, you also need to model this behaviour yourself.

### Healthy remote working

In order to maintain good health and wellbeing, it will be important for you and your team to create boundaries around work and allow time for recovery: be clear about when the working day begins and ends, take breaks to refresh, and know when to step away from your desk. When work is over, it is important to switch off to avoid burnout. You may need to help people create boundaries between work and non-work time. It is also essential to cultivate healthy habits such as taking exercise, eating healthily and getting fresh air every day, as well as getting good social contact and support. Again, as a manager, you need to model this behaviour yourself to show your team that these are important ways of supporting everyone's health and wellbeing.



This relates closely to the behavioural area **being open, fair and consistent**. Look at [Exercise 2](#) for advice on how to develop this area.

### Organisational support for health and wellbeing

You may find it helpful to remind staff of any existing health and wellbeing benefits (such as employee assistance programmes, occupational health, intranet information, training programmes, apps, and so on) and to make sure that your team know how to access these when working remotely.

### Your support matters

[Recent research](#) has shown that those who are in better contact with their line manager have better wellbeing. The way you manage your team can make a real difference to team members' health and wellbeing.



In order for your behaviour to come across as authentic and supportive, you will need to have an attitude of genuine **care and concern for the team's wellbeing and an interest in each individual**. In challenging times, it can be helpful to normalise difficulties and admit that you have struggles too; this can help people feel less isolated and reduce self-blame. [Exercise 5](#) will help in developing your behaviour in this area.

## Understanding organisational policy and legal requirements

In addition to health and safety, remote working has many other practical and legal implications. Large organisations tend to have a homeworking or remote working policy, which can be relied upon if a temporary period of homeworking becomes necessary and for putting in place arrangements for longer-term remote working. The policy may set out guidance on how to communicate with employees and how performance will be monitored. If your organisation has such a policy, it is worth checking what that says about the practical and legal aspects of managing remote workers. If there is no policy in your particular organisation, you may want to discuss with your employer (or HR team if you have one) how to handle key legal and contractual issues. Either way, as well as the health and safety considerations set out above, other policy aspects to consider include the following.

### Employee rights

Remote workers must be treated the same as employees on a work premises, with equal access to development and promotion opportunities and support services. In the immediate crisis period in situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it may be helpful to expressly state that any changes are temporary and that the employee will, if applicable, return to office-based working (or other workplace) once the situation ends. However, as restrictions associated with the pandemic are extended, it may be necessary to establish longer-term remote working agreements.



To enable these conversations around longer-term arrangements for effective ways of working, you need to **build and sustain relationships**. [Exercise 5](#) in the support materials provides advice on this.

### Working time

You may need to specify any changes to hours of work. Will the employee need to be available for work during strict office hours or work a specified set number of hours per day? There may be more flexibility over working hours in a working from home or remote working arrangement, but people still need to comply with the [Working Time Regulations 1998](#), including the working week and daily rest break.

### Equipment

Think about equipment and service requirements such as laptops, internet connection, mobile phone, couriers, stationery, photocopying, printing, and so on. Will the employee require specific equipment? How will this be funded, installed and insured? Who is permitted to access it? There is no obligation on an employer to provide computer or other equipment necessary for working at home, but during the pandemic, given government advice regarding working from home where possible, employers should do what they can to enable home/remote working.

It is prudent to list the equipment that has been supplied in a homeworking agreement, consent or policy. Remember that provision of equipment could be a reasonable adjustment for some disabled employees and may be the safest option for those with existing health conditions or pregnant employees at this time. If you supply equipment, it must pass relevant safety tests. Make sure team members have the support needed to use new equipment or systems, including any coaching they might need to use online systems. Responsibility for repair or replacement if the employee's equipment is used will also need to be clarified.

### Data protection

Employers should make sure data protection obligations are maintained. An employee using their own computer should still process information in compliance with data protection principles. Employers may need to include express terms reserving a right to monitor work communications on home-based devices and set out a reminder about home security, confidential information, passwords, shredding, and so on. How data is transferred between home and the workplace also needs careful consideration.

### IT and broadband

You or someone from your organisation should consider computer virus protection and other security measures and whether there is someone available to help with IT issues. Employees will need confirmation about whether they are expected to cover the broadband cost (plus heating and lighting) or whether the employer will contribute towards these costs and, if so, to what extent.



As a line manager, it may be challenging to resolve these issues on your own, so make sure you seek appropriate support when you need it. This is related to **providing knowledge, clarity and guidance** and you can use [Exercise 4](#) for support in this area.



In addition, it will be important that you are **open, respectful, kind, fair and consistent** when dealing with all these issues. You'll find [Exercise 1](#) helpful here.

## Ways of working, empowerment and trust

A positive and caring people management approach will go a long way to establishing effective ways of working together remotely, but there are a few things to consider relating to how you and your team work collaboratively when you are not in the same location.

### Establishing ways of working

When establishing new remote working arrangements, it is vital to agree ways of working. For example:

- Make sure every team member is clear about how you will work together remotely, how you will keep each other updated, and how frequently.
- Remind your team about the big picture and how their work fits into it.
- Clarify everyone's roles, including your own.
- Make sure expectations are really clear around team members' goals, responsibilities and performance indicators. It is easy for misunderstandings to arise when you are not in the same location, so take time to check that each person has fully understood what you are expecting of them – and what they can expect of you.
- Review short-term goals regularly and adjust as needed, taking into account people's availability, workload and other demands on them.
- If some team members can't carry out all their usual work, consider other skills they can lend to others to meet team goals.
- Different motivation techniques may be needed for remote workers as compared with those working in the office and different individuals will need different approaches. It is important to find out what will motivate each team member and work with them to maintain their motivation and enthusiasm.



To establish effective ways of working, you need to **provide knowledge, clarity and guidance** and **build and sustain relationships**. [Exercise 4](#) and [Exercise 5](#) in the support materials provide advice in these areas.

### Building trust and empowerment

Once you have agreed ways of working and set clear expectations, it is important to trust your team to get on with the work and not to micromanage or disempower them. When managing remote workers, trust is more important than control. Focus on results rather than activity. Working relationships can deteriorate quickly without trust, and wellbeing will suffer.

While it is important for your team to know that they can call on you for support when they need it, it is also vital that they feel empowered to manage their work, get on with their job in an autonomous way, and take decisions independently. Remote working requires time management skills, the ability to work without close supervision, self-motivation and flexibility; you may need to support your team to develop and build these skills.



Of course, trust is a two-way street, so you need to build your team members' trust in you as well. By taking a **consistent approach, being reliable and showing your competence**, you can help your team to trust you. Being **sincere, authentic and caring** will also help build their trust in you. [Exercise 1](#), [Exercise 4](#) and [Exercise 5](#) offer advice on developing these areas.

### Creating an effective virtual team

Scientific evidence shows that virtual teams deal with more challenges than face-to-face teams because they must rely on electronic communications, may have fewer things in common, and potentially have less overlap of working hours.

You can build team cohesion, collaboration and mutual trust through:

- synchronising work schedules as far as is practical
- investing in team-building and teamwork learning sessions
- providing tools for co-ordination (for example file-sharing systems, messaging) and ensuring everyone knows how to use them
- helping people understand one another, giving time and space for different perspectives to be shared and respected – including role-modelling a genuine interest in learning to see beyond your own 'world view'
- finding ways to help people work together – for example, joint projects, mentoring or buddying arrangements
- protecting the team from negative behaviour – from within or outside the team
- building effective communications and relationships (see more below).

When team members are working remotely from one another and most communications are electronic, there is an increased risk of misunderstanding and misinterpretation of messages. This brings with it the potential for conflict, so it is important that you prevent this where possible by establishing good communication systems and approaches, but

also that you are alert to the early signs of conflict within your team, have clear agreed approaches for managing conflict and deal with any conflicts as early as possible, impartially and supportively.



You may find it helpful to think through your capacity to **handle conflict and people management issues**. [Exercise 3](#) offers advice on developing this area of behaviour.

## Communicating with your team and building relationships

Because you and your team are not in the same physical location, there is a risk that team members who are working remotely become invisible to you and to each other, with a risk of isolation, loneliness and disengagement. Clear and effective communication channels are therefore vital, as is keeping in touch with colleagues and avoiding isolation. Team members must be able to communicate easily with you, other people they work with and the organisation (for example, HR and other corporate services).

### Confirm communication methods and regularity

Setting clear expectations about how and when communication will happen can help things to run smoothly. For example:

- **Consider having a daily virtual huddle:** This can help everyone keep connected as a team, check in on each other's wellbeing, keep workflow on track and discuss any additional support they need to fulfil their roles from home. It needn't be long, but regularity is key.
- **Keep a rhythm of regular one-to-ones and team meetings:** This maintains a sense of structure and continuity for all. Checking in with team members at regular times can help combat isolation and stress. You may want to hold longer one-to-ones to allow time for discussion of remote working challenges and for non-work catch-up.
- **Establish when and how team members can contact you:** Ensuring that your team know how and when it is best to contact you will help them feel that you are there to support them. Keeping your calendar visible and maintaining a virtual open door is also helpful.
- **Minimise communication stress:** Set clear expectations about the way employees should deliver and receive communications throughout the working day (for example response times). This will help alleviate pressure and anxiety.

### Consider what is communicated

It is helpful to think through the content of communications, whether that is between you and your team members or within the team:

- **Share information and encourage your team to do the same:** Without physical 'water-cooler conversations', opportunities to pick up information in passing are more limited. Share appropriate updates or learnings from other meetings and projects and invite your team to do the same. Proactively diversify the information shared within the team to include anything that might be useful.
- **Communicate regularly, not just when things go wrong:** While it is important to provide feedback and be clear when something isn't working as you would like it to, it is also vital that you communicate positive, appreciative messages and more general

information. Ongoing, consistent and regular feedback is important. When something isn't working well, avoid blaming and find ways to problem-solve collaboratively.

- **Foster relationships:** Make time for non-work chats, just as you would in the workplace, and use video calling to maintain face-to-face contact. This increases rapport and eases communication between people when they are not meeting physically. It also reduces feelings of isolation.



This relates closely to the behaviour area **being open, respectful, fair and consistent**. Look at [Exercise 1](#) for advice on how to develop this area.

### Think about the attitude and approach you take to communications

It is not just about *what* is communicated, but also about *how* it is communicated:

- **Be kind:** Remote conversations can easily be misinterpreted as it's harder to read body language, tone of voice and other visual and audio cues. Stay particularly mindful of this when delivering difficult messages or feedback. Challenging times call for greater sensitivity and kindness.
- **Tailor your feedback and communications:** People can be more sensitive if they're feeling isolated or anxious, so take this into account when talking or writing. Get to know team members individually so that you understand what they need.
- **Listen closely and read between the lines:** Not being in the same room means you don't have extra information from body language or tone to get the sense of what people are thinking or feeling, particularly in more difficult conversations. Hone in on what's not being said and listen deeply to understand what is going on for people below what they are making explicit. Don't make assumptions, though; ask questions to clarify your interpretation and be open to different perspectives.
- **Develop your empathy and compassion:** In order to support people in the best way possible, it will be helpful for you to be empathetic, allow people to express their emotions, understand what they are feeling without getting overwhelmed yourself, and be motivated to help (all elements of compassionate leadership). If you need support in developing these capacities, the support materials can provide ideas and inspiration; your HR or L&D team may also be able to help, so seek appropriate support when you need it.



Thinking about your attitude and approach to communication will be helped by **building and sustaining relationships**. Use [Exercise 5](#) to outline how you can develop this behavioural area.

### One size won't fit all

Every member of your team is a unique individual, so taking one approach and applying it to everyone is unlikely to work for them all. If you haven't already done so, you will need to build a relationship with each team member, take an interest in them as an individual and find out what is most likely to work for them in terms of communication, as well as ways of working and motivators. This will help you meet each person 'where they are' and consider their individual circumstances.

### Top tips for effective online meetings:

- **Embrace video calling:** If it hasn't already done so, your organisation might need to install video conferencing software such as Skype, Teams or Zoom so that meetings can occur remotely. Being present and seeing each other is an important part of keeping connected.
- **Use headsets or earphones:** This will give better sound quality. Speak directly into the microphone and remember to mute it when not speaking to limit background noise.
- **Establish etiquette guidelines:** Agree that you and everyone on the call won't hide away or do other work during the meeting. Agree a system to give everyone a voice. You may want to arrange 'hands up' signals to agree who speaks next and use chat functions to allow everyone to contribute.
- **Speak clearly and steadily:** This will help ensure everyone can understand you. Try to modulate your voice, to keep people interested and engaged.
- **Use names and give context:** When responding to chat comments, repeat the relevant remarks and make clear who you're responding to. Don't just say 'yes, Jane, that's right' because others may not have seen Jane's comment and it won't make sense to them.
- **Engage participants regularly:** It's hard to simply listen online for a long time. Invite participants to give comments or ask questions, and use tools like chat or polls for interaction.
- **Be explicit about actions and summarise:** Spell out clearly any actions that need to be taken and by whom. Summarise meeting takeaways and circulate notes promptly.
- **Keep slides simple and visual:** If anyone is using slides, keep to a single thought per slide to help participants understand and focus on what's being discussed: it is better to have more slides with fewer things on them. Your participants may be joining from a mobile device and wordy slides will be tough to read: anchor your presentation on relevant, image-based slides.
- **Repeat the question:** The chair/facilitator/presenter should repeat questions – the questions they ask of participants or the question they have been asked – before answering it, to ensure all participants are aware of the original question. Repeating the question in writing within a chat box can provide additional clarity.

## Planning for long-term remote working

Now that the COVID-19 pandemic has moved from the initial crisis phase into a longer-term pandemic-management situation, it is becoming clear that the changed working arrangements, and particularly home/remote working, are here to stay for a while. Even once the pandemic has faded into history, it seems likely that many of the remote working arrangements set up in response to the initial pandemic lockdown will become permanent or be converted into hybrid arrangements, including some time working remotely and some time in an office or work location. We therefore need to recognise that this is a marathon, not a sprint.

In this context, it is vital to keep supporting the team, repeating the messages about self-care and making sure you are role-modelling healthy remote working – for example, taking holidays and time to recover, and ensuring health and wellbeing are maintained through healthy behaviours such as exercise, healthy eating and getting enough sleep.

It is important not to assume that everything has settled down and everyone is now happily working remotely. Check in regularly on how people are doing; ask about what they are enjoying and what they are finding challenging. Find ways to resolve issues that are arising and, if needed, help them find a balance that works for them.

Longer-term activities must not be put on hold. For example, keep professional and career development on the agenda for your team. Ask them about what they want going forward and find ways to support them in building their skills, learning new things and developing their capability and career.



**Supporting development** will be a key behaviour here so refer to [Exercise 6](#) for advice.

Over time, you may find that some of your team members return to the office or work location, while others are not able to or choose not to do so. If this happens in your team, it is essential that you avoid creating a two-tier situation, where the groups feel different/better/worse than each other or where there is resentment between those working remotely and those not. This will take careful and sensitive handling. It will partly be about continuing to apply all the advice set out above so that people feel empowered, engaged and supported; it will also be about supporting as much teamworking and collaboration as possible; and you may need to help people understand and empathise with one another. If conflicts arise, it is essential that you are alert to the early signs and deal with any conflicts as early as possible, impartially and supportively.



Developing your capacity to **handle conflict and people management issues** will allow you to step in appropriately when needed. Refer to [Exercise 3](#) for advice on developing this area.

## Useful resources

- LinkedIn Learning's [remote working](#) course includes insight from entrepreneur Arianna Huffington and can be completed in bite-sized chunks.
- The crowdsourced [Remote Work Survival Kit](#) will arm you with the tools you need to achieve a happy and balanced remote working set-up.
- HR-inform has easy-to-use, [downloadable templates](#) to help you establish your own flexi-time, homeworking, and flexible working policies.
- Acas has produced a [comprehensive guide](#) that includes real-life case studies and advice on meeting homeworking legal requirements as well as health and safety standards.

- The Health and Safety Executive has created a [guide for employers](#) about protecting homeworkers that includes advice on managing stress and mental health.
- Wordpress co-founder Matt Mullenweg [considers](#) how homeworking impacts office dynamics in his four-minute TED Talk.
- A blog from Rescue Time looks at [ways to build community](#) among teams who work thousands of miles apart: many of the key takeaways also apply to remote workers in closer proximity.
- ‘[How to collaborate effectively if your team is remote](#)’ is a short read from *Harvard Business Review* to help your business tackle remote collaboration and perform at the highest levels.
- Get Lighthouse takes an in-depth look at remote working with [11 essential tips on managing remote workers](#).

### Consider using the full range of support materials if you haven't already done so

If reading this guide has highlighted areas of people management capability that you would like to develop, why not use the full range of support materials to help you adopt a management approach that supports good health, wellbeing and engagement in your team?

You can get insight into your management capability across all five behavioural areas by completing the [quiz](#) and then use the [step-by-step guidance](#) to help you get feedback, identify strengths and areas to develop, and plan the action you will take. There is also an [action plan sheet](#), which can be used to note down and track your actions; a [quiz](#) to help you identify potential barriers and develop strategies to overcome them; and a [series of exercises](#) to provide ideas and inspiration relevant to each of the behavioural areas, some of which have already been highlighted above.





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