research
in practice

Supporting
wellbeing remotely

Dartington
Trust

Introduction

This briefing provides evidence-informed guidance to help leaders in social care organisations support the wellbeing of people who are working from home. It was written during the COVID-19 pandemic and aims to draw learning from this period to inform future policy and practice. An overview is provided of the benefits and challenges of remote or home-based working and its implications for wellbeing, team working and professional practice.

A mixed or hybrid approach to office and remote working is also considered for people transitioning back to office working and for the longer term. The need for organisations to take a systemic approach to supporting the work-life balance and wellbeing of people who are working remotely is highlighted and some resources to help leaders accomplish this are provided.

Background

The COVID-19 crisis required a significant proportion of the UK population to work at home for an extended period. While some people found working from home a positive experience, others struggled to adjust to their new working conditions. According to a recent survey, more than nine out of ten (93 per cent) of employees who worked at home during the pandemic wished to continue in some capacity into the future, with around half (47 per cent) wanting to do so often or always (Felstead, 2021).

Estimates vary, but many organisations across the private, public and not-for-profit sectors plan to continue with remote working, at least in the short term. A 'hybrid' model is particularly popular, where the independence and flexibility of homeworking is balanced with the structure and sociability of being on-site (CIPD, 2020).

Working from home has many benefits for individuals and organisations, but there are also disadvantages (see next page). For social care practitioners, it can undermine their sense of psychological safety and belonging to their team and organisation, impair their ability to work collaboratively and productively, and threaten their resilience and wellbeing (Cook et al., 2020). Leaders should therefore be aware of the potential risks of homeworking and how to implement policies and practices to address them and provide employees with effective support.

Homeworking, wellbeing and work-life balance

Research conducted during the pandemic provides insight into the implications of extended homeworking for the wellbeing and productivity of employees (for example, IES, 2020; Nuffield Health, 2020; RSPH, 2021). The benefits and risks include:

Benefits

> More autonomy and flexibility.

> Increased productivity and motivation.

> Improved wellbeing, quality of life and happiness.

> Financial and time gains due to no daily commute.

> The ability of people with long-term health conditions to continue working.

> The increased opportunities for people to engage online with individuals and teams across locations and to participate in virtual learning events.

Risks

> Working longer hours and taking shorter breaks.

> Feeling pressure to be always available and to respond quickly.

> Lack of face-to-face interaction and feelings of social isolation.

> Distractions from family and domestic demands.

> Presenteeism (working while sick).

> Musculoskeletal problems due to inappropriate workspaces.

> Disturbed sleep and resulting fatigue caused by difficulties switching off from work.

In some circumstances, some of the benefits of homeworking can also threaten wellbeing unless recognised and managed. For example, more flexibility can encourage a lack of routine and the time gained from having no commute may be used to extend working hours. Equally, some of the risk factors can have benefits. For example, limited face-to-face contact with colleagues can reduce distractions and improve focus and productivity.

Practitioners attending the webinar **Recovery, work-life balance, wellbeing: how to switch off** (Kinman, 2021) highlighted that they feel the benefits and risks of homeworking can be interrelated and can make them feel conflicted. For example, one reflected:

My commute was often lengthy (and expensive), but also provided much needed reflection time and an opportunity to transition between work/home life that no longer exists now.

The most popular aspect of working from home is the ability to work flexibly, while a lack of social contact is generally rated the worst.

Who are at greater risk?

Research findings indicate that any initial difficulties homeworkers experienced during the pandemic were generally resolved over time (Felstead, 2021). Some people struggled to maintain boundaries between their work and personal life, with negative implications for their wellbeing and productivity. Insight into the characteristics of homeworkers who may experience ongoing challenges can enable organisations to target appropriate support.

> **Parents and carers**
  During the pandemic, one in three employees had their ability to work impacted by their caring responsibilities (CIPD, 2020b). **Guidance (AARP, undated)** is available to help organisations support workers who are caring for others.

> **New recruits**
  Working at home makes it harder for new starters to form relationships and for managers to identify their support needs. Shadowing colleagues on virtual home visits and establishing mentoring or 'buddying' schemes can be helpful (Cook et al., 2020). See page 19 for guidance on spotting that someone is struggling when working from home.

> **People working with trauma**
  Practitioners who are regularly exposed to other people's trauma can be more vulnerable to vicarious trauma and PTSD if they are working at home (see Tehrani et al., 2020, and **guidance from the British Psychological Society (2020)**). This should be part of a trauma-informed approach to supporting workforce wellbeing (see the Research in Practice briefing *Embedding a trauma-informed approach to support staff wellbeing in children's social care* (Wilkinson, 2021)).

> **Social isolation**
  Homeworking can be a particular problem for people who live alone. They are more likely to feel lonely, increasing the risk of mental health problems (ONS, 2020).

> **People with mental health conditions**
  Remote workers may find it more difficult to disclose mental health difficulties and they may not be so easily detected by others when communicating online (CIPD, 2020). **See guidance from Mind (undated)** for managers on supporting the mental health of the workforce.

Homeworking and work-life balance

People who work at home can find maintaining a healthy work-life balance challenging. Work-life balance is defined as *'the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities'* (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). Where work and non-work activities are incompatible, two types of conflict can occur (Greenhaus et al., 1989; Grant & Kinman, 2014):

> **Time-based conflict**, where the time spent in one role restricts that available for other activities. For example, a practitioner with a heavy administrative load is likely to work longer hours, limiting the time left to spend with family or friends. This will reduce opportunities for social engagement and recovery that, over time, can threaten wellbeing.

> **Strain-based conflict**, where negative emotional reactions to work 'spill over' into personal life. Emotionally sensitive situations can lead to workers feeling anxious, distracted or irritable outside work. Unhealthy rumination about work difficulties can also threaten recovery, leading to mental and physical health difficulties and unhealthy behaviours.

Social care practitioners and the importance of work-life balance

> People working in the social care professions are at greater risk of work-life conflict (particularly strain-based) than many other job types (Grant & Kinman, 2014).

> For social care practitioners, work-life conflict stems from the demanding and complex nature of their work, as well as lack of support, short-staffing, a strong sense of duty and involvement in the job, and meeting the expectations of others (Kalliath et al., 2012). Excessively high self-expectations (self-oriented perfectionism) can also intensify work-life conflict by breeding self-criticism and encouraging people to work harder to meet their own unrealistic standards (Kinman & Grant, 2018).

> Work-life conflict also has implications for organisations and for people being supported, as it can diminish practitioners' engagement and motivation and increase sickness absence and attrition (Grant & Kinman, 2014; Community Care, 2019).

Social care practitioners and remote working

Little is known about the experiences and support needs of social care practitioners who are working from home (especially during the pandemic) but some studies offer some useful insights:

> Drawing on interviews, diaries and photographs with practitioners, Jeyasingham (2018) highlighted some ambivalence about remote working: the flexibility and autonomy it can offer was generally considered superficial, and concerns were expressed about data security, safe working in public spaces and professional isolation. Although this study was conducted before the pandemic, it offers some useful insights into how practitioners experience homeworking and how flexibility can intensify work rather than improve work-life balance (Kelliher & Anderson, 2009).

> Cook et al. (2020) conducted interviews with practitioners about their experiences during lockdown. Homeworking was widely thought to present challenges for peer support and the functioning of the team as a secure base, constraining opportunities for sharing experiences and feeling understood by others. Teams that provided a secure base before lockdown continued to do so, but members of teams that were less established tended to have more difficulties.

The importance of a secure base

The importance of a secure base for the wellbeing of social care practitioners is recognised in the Social Work Organisational Research Diagnostic (**SWORD**) framework (Grant, Kinman, Alexander, 2020). It refers to conditions where the organisation provides a sense of containment (protection, safety and being cared for), while offering opportunities for workers to explore fears and threats, and raise constructive challenge to practice and organisational change.

This 'safe haven' provides workers with support, renewed energy and resources. A sense of 'psychological safety' is particularly important when people are working at home, as opportunities for social interactions, support and reassurance may be more limited.

The SWORD diagnostic tool and accompanying workbook can be used by leaders to enhance a sense of security and the other conditions found to underpin organisational resilience.

> Based on interviews with social care practitioners, Pink et al. (2021) highlighted the rapid acceleration of digital practices during the COVID-19 pandemic and the 'creative and improvisatory' modes of engagement with technology practitioners used to interact with people. They argue that social care has emerged from the pandemic as a 'hybrid digital practice' with benefits for workers and families, but a framework is needed to help professionals evaluate how best to use technologies to support their practice and judgements.

Also identified is the need to consult people who use services about their experiences of virtual social care practice (Cook & Zschomler, 2020). This **Research in Practice film** (2021) looks at the ways in which practitioners can support good digital conversations with adults and carers.

> Research conducted by McFadden et al. (2021) that examined the impact of providing health and social care during the pandemic found that practitioners' wellbeing and the quality of their working life deteriorated and work-related burnout increased. Nonetheless, the greater flexibility people experienced when homeworking was generally considered beneficial. Concerns were expressed about returning to 'on-site' working and face-to-face communication.

The importance of maintaining connections with managers, supervisors and colleagues for continued wellbeing was strongly emphasised. This **podcast** (2021) from Research in Practice with Dr Danny Taggart discusses the importance of viewing the experience and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic through a trauma lens when emerging from lockdown restrictions.

Practitioners attending the webinar **Recovery, work-life balance, wellbeing: How to switch off** (Kinman, 2021) highlighted the creative methods they have used to maintain a secure base and gain support using technology:
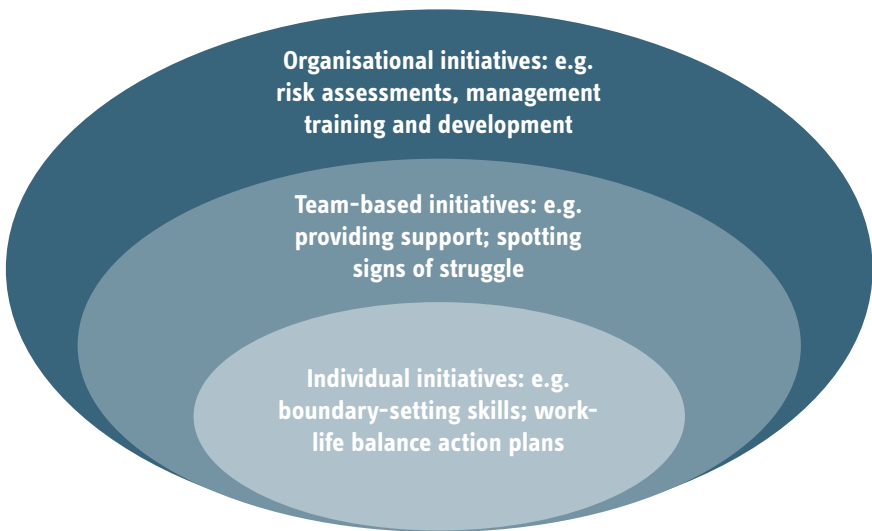
I created a WhatsApp group for my team which replicates what would go on in the office. We can have case discussions and cheeky banter! It works really well.

For a couple of days a week, we have a 'virtual office' where people work alongside each other online and engage in casual conversation. This offers a sense of 'togetherness' and increases motivation.

Other options include setting up a 'virtual kitchen' where people can make coffee and lunch together, sending snapshots of something about their day, encouraging ways to celebrate achievement, and organising virtual workshops or workout sessions.

A multi-level approach to supporting remote working

Social care practitioners can be vulnerable to work-life conflict and this can threaten their resilience, wellbeing and effectiveness. Working at home may intensify these difficulties unless the risks are identified and managed (Cook et al., 2020). To support remote workers, a multi-level approach is recommended (Grant & Kinman, 2014; 2019) where evidence-informed interventions are available at the organisational, team and individual levels (see examples in the diagram below). This resource focuses predominantly on the organisational level, but provides leaders with some strategies that can be implemented at each of these three levels. Links are also provided to other relevant resources.

Organisational initiatives: e.g. risk assessments, management training and development

Team-based initiatives: e.g. providing support; spotting signs of struggle

Individual initiatives: e.g. boundary-setting skills; work-life balance action plans

At all stages, involving staff in co-producing and implementing solutions to support remote working will maximise the relevance and effectiveness of interventions.

Supporting wellbeing in remote workers – key messages and actions to build a multi-level approach.

These guidelines are based on a synthesis of best practice in supporting practitioners to work remotely and include strategies at the organisational, team and individual levels. They can be used as both a short-term response and also to help organisations develop a sustainable approach to hybrid working. The importance of co-producing change and support initiatives with employees is also emphasised.

> **Take a whole system approach to wellbeing**

  Toolkits (for example, **www.bitc.org.uk/toolkit/take-a-whole-system-approach-to-health**) are available to support the mental and physical health of practitioners, whether working at home or on-site.

> **Promote safe and healthy working practices**

  See HSE guidance (**www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm#stress-mental-health**) on supporting remote workers.

> **Agree ways of working**

  Ensure every team member is clear about how they will work together remotely, how they will update each other, and how frequently.

> **Review and, if necessary, revise goals and targets**
  Recognise that people will react differently to homeworking (see the risks and benefits on page 3). Some may be unable to maintain previous performance levels when working remotely, particularly when transitioning to remote or hybrid working. Others, however, may find their productivity increases. There is evidence that any initial decrease in performance is likely to be resolved after an initial period of adjustment (Felstead, 2021).

> **Ensure appropriate equipment and technology**

This includes a suitable workstation, a reliable, secure internet connection, and technical support. Equipment must pass relevant safety tests. Ensure people have the skills required to use technology and receive regular updates.

> **Co-produce a framework**

Develop this with practitioners to inform training on using digital technologies to support their practice and judgements.

> **Make sure information is accessible**

Using cloud-based systems can avoid stress and confusion, and facilitate effective team working.

> **Trust your workforce**

Avoid excessive monitoring and measuring of productivity.

> **Encourage routine and structure**

Short meetings first thing each day can highlight priorities, clarify goals and identify support needs.

> **Provide support via regular check-ins**

People's circumstances and support needs can change, so ensure there are checks on how they are adjusting.

A daily **'YTH'** meeting offers a quick and simple routine, where each team member reports three things in 90 seconds.

> **Y:** This is what I did yesterday.

> **T:** This is what I will do today.

> **H:** This is where I need help.

> **Provide clear guidance on accessing support**

Give people contact details for human resources, occupational health and employee assistance programmes without them having to request them.

> **Foster supportive relationships**

Encourage peer support via social conversations and group activities. Ensure some spaces are 'management free' (for example, a team WhatsApp) to encourage open communication. Setting up a peer coaching initiative could be particularly effective to enhance the wellbeing of people who are home-working and helping to foster a solution-focused approach (Grant et al, 2020). See page 13 of the **Learning organisation** chapter of SWORD.

> **Provide effective online supervision**

Ensure that remote supervision is as relational, emotionally literate and reflective as face-to face – see blog from Research in Practice:

www.researchinpractice.org.uk/all/news-views/2020/april/ supporting-remote-and-online-supervision-during-covid-19

> **Help to create online reflective spaces**

Help practitioners recreate the critical reflection that comes from working alongside colleagues – see:

www.communitycare.co.uk/2021/01/29/creating-online-reflective-spaces-working-home

> **Recognise diversity**

People's circumstances, preferences and support needs will differ. Some practitioners may need specialised equipment and additional support to work safely and productively at home.

> **Be aware of 'Zoom fatigue' and how to avoid it**

Ensure there are adequate breaks between online meetings and lunchtime is meeting free – see:

https://hbr.org/2020/04/how-to-combat-zoom-fatigue

> **Provide guidance on developing a 'healthy' work-life balance**

This should include setting physical and psychological boundaries between 'work' and 'home' (British Psychological Society, 2020a).

> **Introduce policies on managing technology in a healthy and sustainable way**

Include strategies for managing email, online communications and the importance of switching off (ACAS, 2017).

> **Recognise the increased risk of presenteeism among remote workers**

This is already common among social care practitioners and can lead to more serious health problems (see Kinman & Grant, 2021, for guidance on how to manage presenteeism).

> **Be kind and sensitive**

Remote conversations can be easily misinterpreted as it is harder to read body language, tone of voice and other cues. This is particularly important when delivering difficult messages or feedback.

> **Lead by example**

Role model a healthy work-life balance and self-care.

> **Last, but not least, encourage a compassionate workplace culture**
Key to minimising the risks and maximising the benefits of remote working for organisations and individuals is to encourage compassionate leadership and self-compassion (Grant & Kinman, 2019; CIPD, 2020; Andel et al., 2021). See the resource from Research in Practice on *Leading with compassion* (Hafford-Leitchfield, 2019) and guidance on enhancing self-compassion – **https://self-compassion.org/category/exercises**.

The pivotal role of line managers

Line managers play a key role in supporting workers who are working remotely - they are often the main source of communication to and from the organisation. Few have received guidance on how to do this (Parry et al., 2021). It is crucial for organisations to provide line managers with opportunities to develop the social and interpersonal skills and capabilities needed to support, motivate and engage remote workers and how to manage a flexible, hybrid workforce.

The HSE's *Management Competency Framework* (see **www.hse.gov.uk/stress/ mcit.htm**) could form the basis for learning and development. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development also provides a quiz to help managers identify how their approach aligns to the behaviours found to support health, wellbeing and engagement:

www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/people/line-manager/behaviour- framework-alignment-quiz

The Research in Practice Supervisors' Briefing on *Leading with compassion* **(Hafford-Leitchfield, 2019)** will also be relevant. As managers will be under pressure when transitioning to remote or hybrid working, they should prioritise their own self-care and wellbeing:

www.investorsinpeople.com/knowledge/what-does-self-care-look-like-for- leaders.

Encourage regular breaks

Homeworkers tend to take fewer breaks and those taken are shorter. Regular 'microbreaks' (two/three minutes) can improve concentration and reduce stress. Taking short breaks from computer screens can protect eye health and regular physical activity will benefit musculoskeletal health.

Getting outside in the daylight can also improve mental health and the quality of sleep. Break-monitoring software can remind people to take regular breaks, but it is particularly important for leaders to role model this behaviour.

Assessing the risks (adapted from Cook et al., 2020)

Employers have a legal duty of care to support the health and safety of remote workers. In view of its importance, this resource places particular focus on assessing the risks of remote working and how it can inform strategies to support employees.

When considering a move to remote working, leaders should consider some key issues:

> Which roles can and cannot be done remotely?

> Who may or may not want to work remotely? How would this impact on other team members and people who are being supported?

> What work activities will they be doing (and for how long)?

> Can these activities be done safely (paying particular attention to psychosocial risks)?

> How will any concerns be identified and managed?

> How will managers keep in touch with practitioners? Are any groups of people at greater risk of the negative effects of homeworking? **Equality Impact Assessments** (see further resources) that consider the specific risks for people with protected characteristics could be adapted for remote working.

The Social Work Organisational Research Diagnostic (SWORD) survey: A mixed picture

The annual SWORD survey completed in 2020 with 16 local authorities included questions on practitioners' experiences of working remotely during the pandemic. A 'traffic light' system described below was used to highlight areas of good practice and where improvement was needed. The findings can inform local policy and practice in other areas and help organisations target interventions to support remote workers.

GREEN – Positive experiences:

1) My manager trusts me to do a good job.

2) I am clear about what co-workers and managers expect of me.

3) I can access the information systems I need to do my job effectively.

4) I am supported by my team members and feel connected to them.

5) My managers keep in touch.

AMBER – Some need for improvement:

1) My organisation has clear policies and practices for managing change during the pandemic.

2) My managers and co-workers are aware of my personal circumstances and needs and accommodate them wherever possible.

3) Communication with managers and colleagues is effective.

4) My manager 'checks in' with me regularly to ensure I am coping well.

5) My organisation helps me develop the knowledge and skills I need to work remotely.

RED – Clear need for improvement when working remotely:

1) My organisation ensures I have the equipment and space to work safely and effectively.

2) Support is available to help me manage the effects of any grief, loss or trauma I may experience.

3) I am happy with my work-life balance.

4) My organisation is committed to prevent and manage any secondary trauma I may experience.

5) My workload and tasks have been adjusted to enable me to do my job to the best of my ability.

All statements are in reverse order of agreement.

Having conversations about working from home and wellbeing

The **Health and Safety Executive** (HSE) has developed a 'Talking Toolkit' (HSE, undated) to help managers have conversations with people about work-related stress. This framework could also be used at an organisational, team or individual level to assess the psychosocial risks of remote working.

The toolkit provides templates for conversations based on the six HSE *Management Standards* (**www.hse. gov.uk/stress/standards**): **Demands, Control, Support, Role, Relationships and Change**. For example, for support (a major challenge of working at home), it identifies the procedures that should be in place to help employees feel supported within their roles and provides questions to initiate conversations with individuals or teams.

Support – How should your employees feel?

> They receive information and support from colleagues and their managers.

> The organisation has systems in place to enable and encourage managers to support employees and for employees to support one another.

> They know what support is available and how to access it.

> They know how to access the resources they need.

> They receive regular and constructive feedback.

Questions for employees:

> Do you feel your organisation is a positive place to work and that you are valued? Think about the working environment, the support available and the opportunities to talk about support you may need.

> Do you know who to talk to and where to go when you need support? Think about where you would go for help and whether you would feel comfortable doing so.

> What improvements or support could be put in place to help with any of the issues you have talked about? Think about you, your line manager, your organisation.

Set a date to review the proposed changes.

Signs of struggle

Spotting signs of struggle in people who are working at home is more challenging than when interactions are face-to-face, so managers and colleagues should be vigilant for subtle behavioural cues. This checklist has been adapted from evidence-informed guidance with input from social care practitioners who are working remotely and can be used to help identify when somebody needs support see **page 12 of the Wellbeing chapter in the SWORD workbook** (Grant, Kinman, Alexander, 2020):

> Changes in behaviour and attitudes.

> Easily irritated, or emotional outbursts.

> Confused and lacking in focus.

> Quiet and withdrawn, disengaged in video calls or team meetings.

> Deteriorating quality or quantity of work; missing meetings and deadlines.

> Regularly sending emails out of 'usual' working hours.

> Change in the tone of emails and in verbal and non-verbal communication online.

> Not participating in online social activities.

> Looking tired and 'zoning out'.

This list could be discussed with teams and supplemented with any other signs people may have noticed, as well as information from individual Wellness Action Plans.

Wellness Action Plans for remote workers

A **Wellness Action Plan** (WAP) (Mind, undated) takes an individualised approach to the behaviours, thoughts or actions that can affect the wellbeing of remote workers and the support that can be put in place. The template can be customised, but a WAP for remote workers would generally include:

> The information they wish to share with their manager about their situation.

> The pressures they experience when working at home and how this affects their wellbeing.

> The things that help them stay healthy and productive.

> The triggers that can threaten their wellbeing.

> The early warning signs of deteriorating wellbeing (for example, changes in behaviour or mood).

> The support they would like from managers and colleagues.

The WAP can be shared with the employee's line manager to support conversations about wellbeing and identify how to implement tailored support needs. WAPs can also be shared among colleagues to promote openness and understanding and enhance peer support among teams. A WAP will be particularly useful for newly qualified workers or recent recruits to highlight their situation and support needs. It would be helpful to introduce WAPs before a transition to remote working, with regular reviews to share good practice and identify areas for improvement.

Returning to on-site working or moving to a 'hybrid' approach

At the time of writing this resource, there is still some uncertainty about reopening workplaces, with many organisations aiming for a hybrid approach (for example, three days in the office and two at home). The insights gained from the large-scale move to remote working in the pandemic has taught us a great deal about how to manage this effectively. Nonetheless, even if organisations are adopting a hybrid approach, the health and safety of practitioners must be ensured.

People should only return to on-site working when government guidance indicates it is safe and after an individual risk assessment. The HSE provides guidance on conducting a risk assessment (**www.hse.gov.uk/ coronavirus/working-safely/risk-assessment.htm**) to protect workers and others.

Before returning to on-site working, organisations should ensure they can meet three key tests:

> **Is it essential?** Is returning to on-site working vital for productivity or workforce wellbeing?

> **Is it sufficiently safe?** Employers have a duty of care to identify and manage risks.

> **Is it mutually agreed?** Are there mechanisms in place to encourage workers and employers to raise concerns and mutual flexibility to accommodate different needs and working patterns?

When assessing the risks of working on-site, employers should consider the mental health, as well as the physical health, of the workforce. People will have different responses – or some, returning to the office will be a welcome relief, whereas for others leaving the safety of the home may be frightening.

Practitioners attending the webinar *Recovery, work-life balance, wellbeing: How to switch off* (Kinman, 2021), as well as some regular sessions on resilience for Research in Practice, expressed very different preferences about remote working and returning to the office:

I like the routine of going to work – when I am at home, I can't tell where my work life and my personal life begins and ends – everything is blurred.

I am really enjoying working from home. My ability to work effectively is so much better when I can schedule lunchtime and a walk in my day. Things are balanced and I can look after myself properly.

The following actions are synthesised from best practice and will help ensure that the return to on-site working is safe, healthy and productive.

> **Consult workers**
Almost half (45 per cent) of employees feel anxious about returning to on-site work, but this is much reduced among those who feel more consulted (CIPDb, 2020).

> **Encourage a strategic and coordinated approach**
Ensure all employees can access support, involve all stakeholders in planning and review arrangements regularly from the feedback.

> **Assess the psychosocial risks of new ways of working**
Consider using the HSE *Management Standards* framework – **www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards** – to identify the hazards of new work processes and homeworking.

> **Consider diversity**
Identify people's individual support needs and take an inclusive approach to meeting them.

> **Ensure 'at risk' groups are identified and supported**
A risk assessment can highlight people who may need support in particular areas (for example, carers, those with long-term health conditions).

> **Consider a range of support options**
Social care practitioners will benefit more from a '**toolbox**' (Grant & Kinman, 2020) approach than 'one-size-fits-all' solutions. Ensure all interventions are evidence-based.

> **Ensure people are aware of services**
Provide guidance on accessing advice and support.

A Research in Practice blog on managing the risks of home visits for social care practitioners is available here:

www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/news-views/2020/july/child-protection-and-risks-from-covid-19-home-visits-and-the-challenges-of-social-distancing

A tool to support organisations transitioning to remote or hybrid working

The 'SHARE' approach set out below (adapted from Kinman et al., 2020) provides a checklist for employers who are considering transitioning to remote or hybrid working on a more permanent basis and also includes guidance for employees on best practice for the future.

> **Step 1:** Consult the workforce about a possible move to remote working and address their concerns (see previous page).

> **Step 2:** Conduct a comprehensive assessment of physical and psychosocial risks.

SHARE	EMPLOYERS	EMPLOYEES
Safe remote working	> Consider your duty of care and be aware of the risks. > Provide practical guidance. > Maintain trust and communication. > Ensure teams provide a secure base and that people working with trauma are supported.	> Identify an appropriate workspace. > Plan the day and schedule breaks. > Consider privacy and data regulations.

Help yourself and others	> Set realistic expectations. > Review workloads and goals. > Ensure people can access equipment and information. > Communicate and check in regularly. > Support the development of skills for working remotely. > Provide opportunities for support from managers and peers. > Provide reflective supervision. > Ensure line managers are supported.	> Communicate and follow schedule. > Make sure to take regular breaks and switch off. > Develop new skills to work remotely in a healthy and sustainable way. > Support colleagues.
Adapt to change	> Recognise diverse needs and circumstances. > Train and develop line managers. > Understand and manage the risks. > Be aware that circumstances (and risks) can change rapidly.	> Allow time to develop your own style of remote working and establish a routine. > Set boundaries (physical and psychological) between home and work life. > Stay socially connected.
Relieve the pressure	> Use a flexible approach. > Show support. > Monitor workers for signs of struggle. > Role model healthy behaviours.	> Maintain work-life balance. > Keep active.
Evaluate	> Conduct reviews with each employee.	> Review your situation and needs with your manager.

Key messages

For leaders to support working remotely in a healthy and sustainable way it is important to recognise and address the risks for the wellbeing and professional practice of people working in social care. Leaders need a clear understanding of diversity to be able to implement flexible solutions, whilst managing mutual expectations, ensuring effective communication and providing support.

Employees need support to develop the skills and competencies to enable them to work remotely in a safe and effective way, and must feel able to set appropriate boundaries between work and personal life and to prioritise self-care.

In the move to more permanent remote or hybrid working arrangements, what can leaders do to support workers and colleagues to be resilient and effective? In the box below there are some reflective questions for leaders to consider to ensure wellbeing is prioritised when implementing a remote working or a hybrid approach.

Questions to consider to support practitioners' wellbeing

What can you do as a leader when supporting people in your teams working remotely to:

> maintain clear boundaries

> have a positive work-life balance

> feel a sense of belonging

> feel safe carrying out their roles

> maintain collaborative working relationships

> know where to go for support and guidance (peers, line managers, support services)?

As a leader, how do you role model a healthy work-life balance for colleagues in your organisation?

There are also some further factors that might be useful to consider at a broader organisational level when supporting the implementation of remote and hybrid working.

Questions to consider at an organisational level

> What are the learning and development needs of line managers supporting people who are working remotely, in particular with virtual conversations about mental health and wellbeing?

> Are there any individuals or teams in your organisation that may be more vulnerable and need extra consideration when planning support for remote and hybrid working? Examples may include people working with particularly traumatic situations, new recruits and those with caring responsibilities.

> What are the risks involved in introducing hybrid working in your organisation and how could you manage them?

> How can you enable colleagues to have an input into decisions about developing future working practices and locations?

> Does your organisation have a digital strategy for online communication with children, families, adults and carers? Are you confident that it will meet the needs of hybrid working?

> Does your organisation have a supervision policy and does this need updating to suit remote or hybrid working?

> Does your organisation use trauma-informed approaches and could this be extended to support the needs of colleagues who are remote or hybrid working?

Useful resources

https://sword.researchinpractice.org.uk/

www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/toolkit/coronavirus-coping-with-the-challenges-of-working-from-home

Equality Impact Assessments:
https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn06591

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