



Working from Home

Positive connections
for leaders



Working from Home

Positive connections for team members

Many Arts Centre Melbourne team members are now working from home to assist with the prevention efforts for COVID-19.

Last week's guidelines focused on setting up and settling in - hopefully you've set up your space and are settling in nicely.

Let's celebrate some of the things we have already achieved:

- Made a rapid and unexpected transition to working from home, with little preparation or warning.
- In less than two weeks, nearly all team members have left their usual place of work, and set up home offices in some way, shape or form - including ergonomics, IT systems and support, and much more.
- Teams is live and active!

Remember to:

- Complete your [Working From Home Health and Safety Checklist](#) and encourage your team to do the same to ensure we're all set up with the most comfort and safety.
- Consider how your Team Plan may now need to pivot, and focus on work that meaningfully contributes to ACM's recovery and reopening objectives.
- Make sure everyone's using Microsoft Teams appropriately.
- Over-communicate!

This week's guidelines are designed to assist you with positive connections for the mental health and wellbeing of you and your team.

As before, each section links to one of our core values. Our values will continue to unite us, and critically, our values are unchanging – no matter how uncertain the world around us may be.

Positive connections

As we adjust to a new way of working, it's important to continue our positive connections.

When we're physically at ACM, a lot of these happen organically. Whether you're running into someone at Wirth's, manoeuvring in the tiny kitchens, queuing at Protagonist, bumping out a show, or even just a thirty second lift ride, we have hundreds of positive connections by accident every day.

Add to that all the wonderful routines you have with family and friends, and our days are filled with beautiful interactions that we might not even have noticed!

Working at home, having our partners, flatmates, children and pets around us, chatting on video calls rather than face to face, and eating in our home kitchens have disrupted many of these incidental connections. Hopefully, it's also presented an opportunity for new ones, too.

Mental health and wellbeing

The World Health Organisation defines mental health as "a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community."

Connecting with people is a critical element of psychological wellbeing and happiness. Martin Seligman, one of the founders of positive psychology, developed five core elements, termed PERMA:

Positive emotion - feeling good, remaining optimistic

Engagement - being absorbed in activities or tasks

Relationships - authentic connections, sense of belonging

Meaning - purpose, contributing to the 'why'

Accomplishment - goals, ambition and achievements

At a time when so many people are feeling the impacts of chaos, uncertainty and fear, caring for our mental health and wellbeing is more important than ever.

We want to take care of each other, too – but remember, you can't pour from an empty cup, so focus first on ensuring you're prioritising your own wellbeing and self-care.

This guide aims to seed plant ideas on how to increase our positive connections - with each other, with our family, friends, pets - even within our own brains – to help us thrive during this uncertain time.

Leadership

Take responsibility for your own behaviours

The art of communication

- Make active, positive communication one of your top priorities and a very deliberate part of your leadership actions.
- Communication needs to be even more actively managed and deliberate when managing teams that are working from home. Many of our incidental catch ups will have been interrupted, so look for other opportunities to make connections, check in, and share information.
- Mix up your communications to suit different styles within your team, their access to different channels (e.g. team members who may not be on social media), and the sensitivity of what you're sharing. Consider 1:1 email, group emails, Teams chat, phone calls, video calls, or ACM Team Facebook page.
- If members of your team are stressed or anxious, they may not be interpreting or processing information in the same way they usually do. Keep your communications clear, simple and thoughtful - be prepared to repeat information, and communicate more frequently than usual.

Adjusting to a new, temporary 'normal'

- Our team appreciates that this is a genuine and complex crisis. Aim to stabilise your team as best you can into this new way of working.
- Lead with realistic calm; role model and encourage patience. Ensure information shared about what's happening at ACM and within the broader community is reliable, and neither falsely reassuring nor completely catastrophic.
- While allowing for a period of reaction and readjustment, be sure to look for opportunities to give team members a sense of control and autonomy over their work.

Consider your leadership shadow

- Be conscious of your tone over email, chat etc. Without body language and other social cues, how might your words be interpreted?
- Are you more or less available than you were in the office? Manage the expectations of your team as to when you're able to be contacted - you may need to be more available to your team than usual, but you don't want to have to respond to every chat within 30 seconds!

Community

Walk the floor: actively engage with colleagues outside of your own team

Collaboration is key

- When we're physically distant and isolated from one another, it's crucial to focus on building a sense of team and community across all of ACM. This can be as simple as saying, "we" rather than "they" whenever sharing information from another department.
- Role model and encourage collaboration. Communicate the purpose and value of the cross-departmental teams that are working on the various responses to COVID-19, and encourage your team members to continue - or even increase - their collaborations across ACM.
- Provide more recognition, praise and encouragement than usual. Share as many positive stories from across the organisation as possible, and encourage others to do the same. Allow time and space for celebrating success.

'Walk the floor'

- Your 'floor' is now more digital, written and spoken, but still critical. The standards you 'walk' past are the standards you accept - move quickly to stop or redirect unhelpful behaviour or interactions. Pick up the phone straightaway - don't hope it will pass or go away by itself.
- Encourage your team to proactively articulate their wellbeing needs with one another, and find ways to support each other's mental health, social and work needs as best they can.
- Schedule virtual coffee or lunch breaks with your team and peers, and encourage your team members to do the same and to look out for one another.

Care More

Check in on team members' wellbeing and show empathy

Look after yourself

- As a manager or leader, you will be experiencing your own emotions as well as feeling responsible for your people or teams. As leaders, we are used to being in control and providing guidance and support to others, but we are also human.
- Remember that feeling anxious, fearful, stressed, angry and irritable are common and normal feelings during uncertain times. Identify your responses and feelings and ensure that you look after yourself and get support if needed. It is difficult to support others when we are experiencing heightened stress.

Actively offer and give support

- It can be much harder to read the signs of poor mental health in your team when working from home. Communicate your explicit concern and desire to ensure your team are tracking ok, and share that while you will do your best to support them and check in on them regularly, ask that they speak up if they're struggling, as early as possible.
- Empathise that it can feel unsettling to be working in a new way without much preparation, but encourage perspective and balance. Be alert to signs of avoidance, feeling stuck, resistance to using communications tools (e.g. teams), or team members acting out of character.
- Know and identify the signs and symptoms of stress, including the emotional responses which people may be experiencing. Feelings of anxiety and fear are normal in circumstances such as these, and support is available. Use the EAP yourself so that you can speak confidently about the experience and benefits.
- Do not engage in "catastrophizing" conversations. Encourage people to focus on the things they can control, and the basics of good mental and physical health - diet, sleep, exercise, taking breaks, reducing excessive exposure to media and social media, and seeking support.
- Everyone will have their own response and most of these responses are due to fear. Be kind and offer support.

Creativity

Use creativity to effectively manage uncertainty and disruption

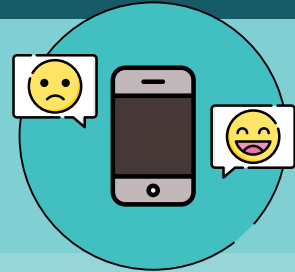
Treat this as a learning opportunity

- What good can come of this new set up? You could get some amazing creative ideas from your team about new ways of working (not just in terms of work styles and logistics, but the way we do business at ACM).
- Are there productivity gains? If there are less meetings and less distractions, are there opportunities to prioritise more focussed work?
- Your team members might need to self-manage and self motivate - see this self leadership as a positive. Learn from those who really step up.
- If you and/or your team members had long commutes, share what you've gained from the extra time - sleep in, breakfast with the kids, exercise, even just as simple as feeling less stressed first thing!
- Treat this experience as a rehearsal for the potential future of some or all of our work - utilising more technology, working collaboratively through different platforms - even the very way we do business is being questioned. Take note of your learnings to ensure that the positives of this change last well beyond the actual disruption.

Think creatively about the impact on your team

- While some team members may thrive when working from home, others may struggle. Extroverts who get their energy from people might feel more tired than usual. Equally, an introvert struggling in a share house or with family around them all day! Maximise people's energy, not time, for the best outcomes.
- Be conscious of workload and work hours. Sometimes there's a perception that working from home means lazing on the couch and daytime TV. Studies have found, however, that those working remotely often work longer hours, and find it hard to disengage from work.
- As you can't 'see' when someone is in the office, notice when they send emails or are online on Teams. Respectfully determine if they are making deliberate choices to work outside 'normal hours' or if they are really working more than they should be. Don't let yourself or others burn out.
- Set boundaries. Just because we can access our workspace 24/7, doesn't mean we should. Encourage people to 'sign off', the same way they'd say bye to each other at the end of the work day, so you know when people are done for the day and enjoying their down time.

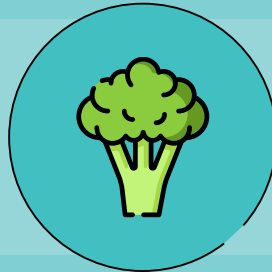
Coping with stress during the 2019-nCoV outbreak



It is normal to feel sad, stressed, confused, scared or angry during a crisis.

Talking to people you trust can help. Contact your friends and family.

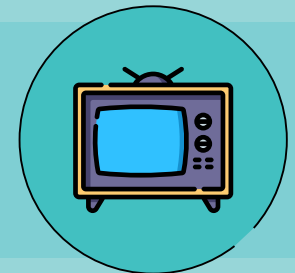
If you must stay at home, maintain a healthy lifestyle - including proper diet, sleep, exercise and social contacts with loved ones at home and by email and phone with other family and friends.



Don't use smoking, alcohol or other drugs to deal with your emotions.

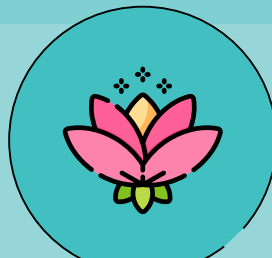
If you feel overwhelmed, talk to a health worker or counsellor. Have a plan, where to go to and how to seek help for physical and mental health needs if required.

Get the facts. Gather information that will help you accurately determine your risk so that you can take reasonable precautions. Find a credible source you can trust such as WHO website or, a local or state public health agency.



Limit worry and agitation by lessening the time you and your family spend watching or listening to media coverage that you perceive as upsetting.

Draw on skills you have used in the past that have helped you to manage previous life's adversities and use those skills to help you manage your emotions during the challenging time of this outbreak.



Other resources

Creating positive connections

[Arts Wellbeing Collective: Looking after your mental health during COVID-19](#)

[Arts Wellbeing Collective: Performance Energy Meditations](#)

[Arts Wellbeing Collective: Your Pocket Guide to De-Role](#) (perfect for transitioning from work mode to home mode!)

[Arts Wellbeing Collective: House Lights Up – podcasts promoting positive mental health in the performing arts](#)