**Respectful Workplaces – Managing working from home**

**Purpose**

Working from home and being connected electronically means there are new considerations in relation to building and maintaining a respectful workplace. This document provides information on the new challenges you and your team might face, how to ensure a positive virtual working environment and manage bullying, harassment and discrimination issues when they arise.

As a people manager, it is your role is to create a safe, inclusive, and respectful workplaces that support employees to be productive. You can achieve this by role modelling and reinforcing positive behaviours, identifying and addressing disrespectful behaviours, and restoring trust in the team when an issue has occurred.

Isolation and a lack of visibility are challenges for virtual teams and can affect morale, work relationships and productivity. Without social and emotional interaction, employees may feel unsupported and excluded. They may also feel they are battling the misperception they are not really working. In many cases these concerns will be impacted by additional anxieties surrounding Covid-19. The transition to working from home for all staff where possible will be different for everybody, and each staff member, including those with [disabilities](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/Pages/production.aspx#/app/news/detail/3707/support_for_staff_with_disability), will take time to adjust.

**Challenges**

Virtual distancing takes different forms, including:

* physical distance – the geographic separation of team members
* operational distance – the quality and type of communications (virtual meetings and discussions compared to the those originally done face to face), other demands on members (working on other tasks, projects or programs), distribution of members across work streams, and technological capability
* affinity distance – distribution of members within the organisation hierarchy, communication styles and cultural differences, interdependence and past familiarity

**Tips for managing a respectful virtual workplace**

**Setting your team up for success**

Begin by having a team discussion that recognises that:

* a change from a co-located to a virtual team can result in people feeling disconnected, isolated and vulnerable
* miscommunications, and other stumbling blocks and encourage these to be raised early so that they can be addressed
* people may experience anxiety related to the coronavirus
* follow this up with a 1-1 conversation with team members to discuss their concerns and confirm their understanding. Use this discussion to identify and agree appropriate behaviours and ways of working in the virtual context.

Teams perform best when they maintain trust, foster productive discussion, reinforce commitment, hold themselves and others accountable, and achieve results based on agreed objectives. Virtual teams can do these things with a little extra communication and intentionality, leading to a more effective and results-based environment. Begin this process by having a team discussion that recognises that:

Management actions to reduce isolation and promote inclusion in work relationships include:

* checking in informally with each of your team members – this encourages them to feel valued
* establish communication protocols
* promoting social interaction among team members
* encouraging team members to pair with and mentor each other
* promote and agree standards of behaviour which can be done through discussion, leadership and modelling. Use the team discussion template in this document to structure a conversation.
* facilitating entry for new team members
* have team discussions about trying new methods of connecting virtually, for example using Skype or Webex meetings, booking in time for team catch ups, celebrate birthdays, achievements and work milestones
* continue to discuss their development needs and provide opportunities for development.

Use the checklist in this document to consider your own management actions.

**Identifying issues**

Where there is an absence of personal connection or trust, there is a risk of breakdown in respect and courtesy among colleagues. This can be exacerbated when overlaid by workplace stressors, such as remote working arrangements for an unknown period of time. Virtual conversations with the absence of visual cues may result in a misinterpretation of messages and motives.

Bullying and harassment includes behaviour that intimidates, degrades or humiliates another person. When we are not in the same physical location it is challenging to recognise the signs that disrespectful and/or more serious behaviour is taking place and facilitate steps to halt it. In some ways, working remotely allows you to spot the most obvious examples of bullying, harassment and discrimination with abusive or inappropriate criticism on conference calls, team meetings and email often being noticeable.

Common disrespectful behaviours for virtual teams include:

* Exclusion – not inviting people to certain conference calls or meetings or including them in group emails.
* Withholding critical information - this can be as innocent as “out of sight out of mind” or can be the first targeted step to actively disrupting someone’s work or damaging their reputation.
* Gossip – this is a common method to cutting people off from each other and undermining how they are perceived.
* Active hostility - this can take the form of belittling people in virtual meetings and conference calls, shutting down their contributions in front of others, and hanging up or ending interactions suddenly. It can also mean sending threatening emails, texts or messages.

**Managing issues when they arise**

To help prevent a breakdown in respect and courtesy:

* convene a meeting with team members and discuss what standards for behaviour are expected. What constitutes courteous behaviour? What can be regarded as disrespectful?
* encourage them to name the disrespectful behaviours they witness and describe the impact it is having on them.

If managers notice disrespectful behaviours, or it is brought to their manager attention by others, **managers must investigate and address it directly** and communicate the actions and expectations, whether or not a formal complaint has been lodged. The [Guidelines for Managing Complaints, Misconduct and Unsatisfactory Performance](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/workm/Pages/conduct.aspx) are intended to assist with managing complaints against employees and unsatisfactory performance and misconduct involving employees.

The Department’s Employee Conduct Branch can also provide advice and assistance to managers on the appropriate course of action to take. The Branch can be contacted on 7022 1041or by email at [employee.conduct@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:employee.conduct@edumail.vic.gov.au).

**Further information**

Visit the [Respectful Workplaces HR Web page](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/divequity/Pages/respect.aspx) for more information on:

* Rights and responsibilities
* Learning resources
* Reporting and managing bullying, harassment, discrimination or victimisation
* Supports
* Policies and legislation

[Diversity and Inclusion](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/divequity/Pages/default.aspx)

[Equal Employment Opportunity](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/divequity/Pages/default_eeo.aspx)

**Contact Information**

Email: [respectful.workplaces@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:respectful.workplaces@edumail.vic.gov.au)

**Checklist**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| My team is encouraged to be self-aware in relation to the impact Covid-19 and remote working may be having on them and to ask themselves:   * Am I feeling a bit overwhelmed? * Am I constantly checking the headlines and looking for updates? * Am I ruminating so much on coronavirus that I’m not focusing at work? * Am I able to hear objective facts or am I focusing on fears and potential scenarios? |  |
| I have facilitated a team discussion to identify the behaviours that demonstrate a positive working environment and identify inappropriate behaviours – see team discussion template. |  |
| Clear standards of behaviour for remote working have been set and agreed by the team. |  |
| Communication protocols have been established. |  |
| New employees receive a local induction (this is in addition to the Department induction all new employees complete online via eduPay). |  |
| All team members discuss their development needs and opportunities for development are provided. |  |
| Provide regular performance feedback, including about behaviour |  |
| I understand the Department’s policies and procedures for dealing with workplace bullying, harassment and discrimination and know what to do if someone raises a complaint or a concern.  See [Managing Complaints, Misconduct and Unsatisfactory Performance - Public Service](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/workm/Pages/conduct.aspx) HRWeb page. |  |
| Bystanders are encouraged to speak up when they see or hear something inappropriate. |  |
| I maintain confidentiality and impartiality if incidents are reported and ensure procedural fairness in managing complaints. |  |

**Remote Working – Team discussion for building and maintaining a respectful workplace culture**

Have a team discussion to identify:

* the behaviours you feel demonstrate a positive working environment.
* any barriers to establishing or maintaining a respectful workplace
* what will you do to create or sustain a one

To support the conversation, consider:

Public Official Obligations (Code of Conduct)

Public officials are expected to demonstrate respect for colleagues, other public officials and members of the Victorian community by:

* treating them fairly, transparently with all decisions made based on merit and equity
* ensuring freedom from discrimination, harassment and bullying
* using their views to improve outcomes on an ongoing basis

Representative Behaviours for DET (DET’s Values)

We always:

* treat everyone in a considerate, fair and courteous manner
* maintain confidentiality and treat private information properly
* recognise the achievements of others and share team success
* listen and encourage everyone to explain ideas and actions
* ensure that everyone has the right tools to do their work
* collaborate and engage constructively with each other working towards a common goal

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **QUESTIONS** | **RESPONSES** |
| How do we feel about working remotely? |  |
| What does a Respectful Workplace look like for our team in a remote working context? |  |
| What are some of the potential barriers (issues and challenges) to achieving this? |  |
| What do we need to do to *enable/maintain* a respectful workplace culture & achieve success? |  |