



## Mental Health Awareness Week

### Pauline Drissell Explores - How to reduce anxiety

Sadly, public fear and anxiety are on the rise. The pace of change over the past 2 months has been stellar and for some employees being on the front line, remote working, financial worries, furlough and family and health concerns can lead to poor mental health.

We can't control everything, but there are a number of practices which can help reassure and reduce tension:

#### If you're a manager or team leader:

- 1. Keep communicating** – people fill silence with noise. If you don't proactively communicate, people will turn to external sources such as news or social media for their information. You lose control of the conversation and end up responding to rumour, rather than being on the front foot.
- 2. Make that communications two-way** – ensure there's easy to access for people to ask questions confidentially. Update and send out any FAQ documents to ensure people know you are listening and that there is a plan. Remember that communication consists of 2 parts: speaking and listening. Most of us need to get better at listening. Listen to understand, be alert to tone of voice, any change in mood. Pay particular attention to your workers who live on their own.
- 3. Share your own feelings and experiences** – this gives permission for others to do the same. It's normal to feel worried or apprehensive at a time like this.
- 4. Accept that people may be distracted, and productivity may be down** – a brain under stress is one which is unable to make rational decisions and concentrate as well as usual. It can also cause aspects of people's personality to become exaggerated or even to alter markedly. Knowing your team will help you to spot whose behaviour has changed and who is struggling. Acknowledging that can reduce the stress burden in itself.
- 5. Use your Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)** – often the services offered will include access to a trained counsellor. This can provide external reassurance to staff members

6. **Staff on the front line** - Ensuring adequate supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) and tests are available for use by staff providing care to suspected or confirmed cases of Covid-19.
7. **Sign-post** - when you know a member of your team is struggling either emotionally, financially, or physically. Use the skills you have either in house or via connections or suppliers to provide the necessary support.
8. **Balance** - check that you or your team aren't working even longer hours than when they worked in the office.
9. **Act early** - to try and build in support before the concerns feel insurmountable.
10. **Seek advice** - this will help you share the load and may help with your own anxieties.

#### **For Everyone...**

11. **Read** our article on the impact of personality on working at home. <https://emaconsultancy.org.uk/our-news/working-from-home-how-your-personality-is-affecting-your-performance/>
12. **Look after yourself well.** If you don't, you can't look after others.
13. **Sleep is restorative** - get more of it by having caffeine-free drinks after midday, putting away mobiles and laptops at least an hour before going to bed, putting devices into hibernation mode overnight (except for emergency calls), avoid the 10 o'clock news which can be unsettling at night time.
14. **Is sleep evading you?** - Try counting from 100 backwards and keep going back to 100 if you get distracted. Or try taking an in-breath, breathing into your abdomen and make your outbreath twice as long. Do this several times and it will help you doze off as it calms your nervous system.
15. **Yoga, music and meditation calm the mind** - Join an online class or download a recording.
16. **Exercise boosts health and combats stress** - try and get out in the fresh air at least once a day; the air quality has never been better.
17. **Vitamins D and C supplements build immunity** - also try unfermented foods such as kefir, kombucha and sauerkraut which furnish your gut with good bacteria.
18. **Take one day at a time** - try not to fix your horizons too far into the future to avoid disappointment. Settle for the here and now.
19. **Accept what you can and can't control** - it will take some pressure off you and you'll worry less as a result.
20. **Every day do something which will bring you pleasure** - and stay safe.