BERRY STREET | Believing In Children, Young People, Families & Their Future.

COVID-19 Managing Your Team Remotely

As at 23 March 2020

The COVID-19 outbreak creates unique challenges for organisations, managers and individuals. Managers need to respond with new and specific approaches to this context, especially with staff who are working remotely. This guide describes these in detail.

Prioritising work

Staff may not be able to undertake all their normal work duties and may have capacity to assist the wider team and/or organisation with discrete tasks. You should:

- Assess which roles can be fully undertaken working from home
- Identify roles that may not be able to be fully undertaken and what other work they can do to help the team such as project tasks, policy reviews, etc.
- Identify with your staff any previous experience or skills that may be able to be leveraged to assist other teams to ensure Berry Street meets critical client service needs.

Set your own expectations

You need to trust that your remote team members are working productively, and to have understanding for people if their working conditions are not ideal. Some staff may be finding the situation very difficult and you will need to provide them with support as the weeks unfold.

- Be mindful that they may have children at home if schools close, and that they may need to stagger some of their work to be done outside normal business hours.
- Some people may not have ideal home ergonomics. Don't expect them to sit at their computers all day; they will need to take breaks, walk around the block and leave their computers for periods of time.
- Some will have housemates, partners, children or other dependents in their home-based work location. Background noise may be an issue when you are speaking on the phone and there may be interruptions. Ask your team to familiarise themselves with our privacy information for those with client-based responsibility.
- If everyone in their area is working remotely there may be internet bandwidth issues. You will need to be aware of this and any possible impacts on productivity. Consider if

they can do some work off-line when there is internet issues which can be transmitted at a later time.

- Trust is the most important component to support working remotely. If you are concerned that a team member is not working in a consistent manner, contact your Senior Manager, who will upline to a HR Business Partner for information and support.

Set clear work expectations with team members

Having clear expectations is crucial for remote working arrangements. Ensuring that you and your employee are aligned with what needs to be done and any timelines will avoid misunderstanding and provide structure and certainty.

- Clarify and confirm daily tasks and outcomes. These may need to be revisited regularly.
- Agree on an appropriate number of check-ins. Consider a shorter conversation at least once per day, and a more formal and longer weekly or fortnightly discussion.
- Allow up to one hour for longer check-ins. Make a personal commitment to ensure the check-ins proceed as scheduled.
- Set guidelines and expectations about daily tasks and agree on a mechanism for answering urgent questions, for example, you may wish to nominate Microsoft Teams or Skype for pressing queries.
- Develop a shared understanding of team priorities and examine any ideas to assist other team members.
- Work with your team to utilise technology features that help to enhance 'visibility', such as the "status message" on MSTeams and Skype, sharing visibility of your Outlook calendar across the team, and using 'chat' to let the team know when you're logging off for lunch or at the end of the day (as you would when you leave the office in person).

Maintain Connections and Communicate Strongly

Staff need to hear from you to maintain their sense of trust and connection. Teams need to continue having a shared sense of connection, identity and purpose. It is important that individuals don't lose contact with their colleagues and are encouraged to continue daily interactions to assist team cohesiveness.

- Implement a short daily group check in call to touch base, review work, and share concerns and issues. Use Skype or Microsoft Teams as appropriate.
- Prepare and communicate team meeting schedules and ensure team meeting invitations are sent promptly and are in everyone's calendars.

- Share what you know about the situation from a Berry Street perspective. Don't worry if you are repeating the same information, now is the time to communicate often and regularly.
- When the situation improves and some office-based work is able to be supported, agree on times with team members as to when they will attend the office. Attempt to have teams working together where possible to maintain relationships and responsibility for shared work, whilst maintaining spatial distancing not exposing large groups to risk.

Give Recognition

It's extremely important to continue to provide consistent praise and recognition for work, client interactions and projects that are well done.

- Work from and recognise people's strengths.
- Don't fall into the trap of contacting people only when something is wrong. A lack of positive communication can crush morale. You must be deliberate and frequent in offering positive feedback and praise.
- Use multiple channels to recognise effort – this can include email, Skype or Microsoft Teams.

Individualise Your Response

Managers need to respond to the unique needs and situations of each worker. This is part of good management in general but becomes critical when leading remotely. It is important that you continue to build connection and rapport with every member of your team. Good communication will help you work through any problems they may face and encourage individuals to speak up when they need your assistance.

- Rapport does not come from always talking about work. Rapport comes from getting to know team members as people and making time for small talk.
- Ask what they're doing in their free time, what TV shows they are watching and about any interests you know they have. Ask about their partners, family, and pets.
- Explore any concerns they might have about the situation they are experiencing. Demonstrate that you care; this is important and when working remotely it's even more essential for you to truly understand their health and well-being needs.

Support Staff Wellbeing

It is understandable in the current situation that people may be experiencing anxiety, distress and concern, and this is accentuated by the absence of some of the normal protective factors we have from work (interaction with colleagues, structure, routine).

Continuing support from managers becomes more important in supporting people's wellbeing.

- Check in on their emotional state. Ask: *How are you feeling?* Acknowledge expressions of distress.
- Model remaining calm and maintaining perspective.
- Help them think about structuring their time with work tasks, allocating work hours, and establishing a dedicated workspace.
- Encourage staff to access good quality information, and to find a balance in relation to media coverage.
- Encourage them to remain connected with family, friends and colleagues.
- Encourage healthy routine and activities including diet and exercise and allow them to work that into their working from home routine.
- Remind them they can seek professional support if needed – most mental health providers are now offering video and phone support and consultations.

Continue to Offer Learning Opportunities

Working from home provides opportunities to pursue professional development and online learning.

- Make time to regularly review your team member's performance.
- Check the Learning Hub and encourage team members to complete any online learning that is available and relevant to their role.

Continue to support new staff

Setting up an induction plan for your new staff member and scheduling time to connect with them via Skype is critically important. You are also required to complete our usual probation process.

- Introduce the new team member to the whole team via email and include the team member in your email. Ask them to provide you with information you can share with the team such as:
  - A few details about themselves (e.g. their location, personal interests)
  - Where they worked before joining Berry Street
  - What skills they'll bring to the team
  - What they're looking forward to about starting their new role
  - A few photos of themselves (optional)
- Encourage your team members to message the person individually to ensure they feel welcomed and part of the group.

- During and after their remote onboarding process, request feedback so you can ultimately correct or improve their experience. Questions could include:
  - How have you found the first few weeks? (Acknowledge that this has been a difficult induction process).
  - What could we have done better to make your transition easier?
  - What parts of the onboarding process helped you understand our team better?
  - Is there anything I can do to better support you?

What you need to do right now

- Update Preceda and your supervisor/manager with your emergency contact information.
- Speak with your staff about any carer obligations and their capacity to work if schools/childcare are closed. Your own capacity to work may also be impacted by carer obligations including elder care requirements.
- All decisions about working from home need to be made in consultation with your Supervisor/Manager. Team members will need to complete the new *Self-Assessment on Working from Home and Other Safety Advice During COVID-19*; a new safety self-assessment guide for working from home.
- Review the team's current work tasks and priorities and consider whether these can be completed remotely and what other work the team may be able to progress. You may also consider what other work your team could do to support colleagues across Berry Street.
- Ensure staff are familiar with Skype and Microsoft Teams and know how to conduct virtual meetings.

To re-cap: Make sure you stay connected

- Check up on your colleagues regularly, share jokes and cat or dog videos in lieu of chocolates.
- Encourage team members to stay on top of any email or other communications that come through.
- Ask them to reach out to each other to maintain personal and professional connections.
- Maintain good communication with your own line manager and ensure you are letting them know your needs as well as the issues and successes of your team as they occur.
- This is a guide for all supervisors and managers at all levels at Berry Street.