

Signs someone working from home might be in physical or mental distress

There are signs that you can look out for that might indicate that someone who works for you is not well. It is harder to do this when you are working remotely from each other and so managers will have to make more of an effort to stay in touch with colleagues working from home.

Signs to notice

Signs to notice might be the way in which the person behaves or talks about physical symptoms. None of these alone indicate that someone might be experiencing ill health, but you should be wondering whether something might be wrong if the behaviour is out of character or unusual for that individual or carries on for a long period of time.

Meetings

While we are isolating and working from home managers should be continuing with their catch ups and one-to-one meetings. It should be possible to see each other during these meetings by using apps such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, WhatsApp, Facebook Live or Facetime. Things to look out for during such meetings include:

- Requests to delay postpone meetings to hold them later in the day or being persistently late. This might be an indication that they are finding it hard to get up in the mornings either through lack of motivation or working late into the night. Alternatively, it might be because they are trying to manage new routines with other family members needing the room or bandwidth for their meetings or that children or other family members need to be cared for during those times. Ask to talk about how they are managing working from home and explore these issues with them to see if you can help with scheduling your own meetings with them.
- Turning the video feature off when they had previously been using it. Some people do not like using the camera but do try to encourage it's use when meeting one-to-one.

Someone might choose not to turn on the camera because they know or think they look unwell, have been crying or have an injury such as a black eye that indicates they might be experiencing domestic violence. Have a conversation about the use of the camera. It can be unhelpful for some people who find it distracts them or if they themselves don't use it because for example, they have a visual impairment. Remember too that people can be embarrassed about revealing too much of their home. Advice on how to set up virtual backgrounds can help with this.

If you are concerned about their health or wellbeing however, you do need to talk to the person about it.

Other behaviours to look out for:

- Not getting things done – e.g. missing deadlines or forgetting tasks.
- Erratic or unpredictable behaviour.
- Emotional responses such as irritability, aggression or being tearful.
- Complaining of lack of management support.
- Being fixated with fair treatment issues.
- Complaining of not coping with workload.
- Being withdrawn from colleagues and not participating in conversations. This might be more difficult to notice on large meetings held remotely so try to go round everyone to hear them at catch up meetings.
- Frequent conversations about drinking alcohol or any suggestion that they might have been drinking during the day.
- Inability to concentrate during catch ups or meetings or mentioning this to you.
- Being indecisive.
- Having difficulty remembering things.
- Displaying a loss of confidence.
- Unplanned absences, either as sickness or just during the working day with no explanation about where they have been.
- Getting into arguments or conflicts with team members / managers.
- Being quick to use grievance procedures.
- Increased errors and / or accidents.

Or alternatively:

- Taking on too much work and volunteering for every new project.
- Being adamant that they are right and know the right way to do things.
- Working too many hours – e.g. logging on early and sending emails late at night and on days off.

- Being louder or more exuberant than usual.

Also look out for physical / physiological signs such as:

- Any suggestion that they have the symptoms of Covid-19.
- Being tired all the time and complaining of not sleeping.
- Being run down and getting frequent minor illnesses.
- Having headaches.
- Reduced reaction times – e.g. when responding to questions.
- Dishevelled appearance or not taking the same care over appearance as usual when on video calls.
- Gastro-intestinal disorders.
- Rashes.

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If such behaviour persists over a period of days or weeks you need to talk to the person about it.

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- erratic or unpredictable behaviour
- emotional responses such as irritability, aggression or being tearful
- complaining of lack of management support
- being fixated with fair treatment issues
- complaining of not coping with workload
- being withdrawn from colleagues and not participating in conversations (this might be more difficult to notice on large meetings held remotely, so try to go round everyone to hear them at catch up meetings)

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