



Supporting those experiencing anxiety arising from Covid-19, or on returning to the workplace.

The Covid-19 pandemic, and the measures taken to manage it, have impacted upon the lives of everyone. Some have experienced bereavement, illness, separation from family and loved ones, others huge disruption to their lives, increased concern or worry for their wellbeing, or that of their family and friends. Others still will have experienced frustration at not being able to get on with life as normal and do the jobs they enjoy.

All of us have had to learn a new set of rules to live by during the duration of the pandemic. Most have adopted these rules and adhered to them fully, in the interest of bringing the pandemic to an end, and for their own safety and that of others. For many, adopting these new rules has provided at least some sense of security and safety during an uncertain and worrying time. As these rules change, many may lose the sense of security they have provided. For others the measures may have been a source of frustration.

Studies undertaken in the past on the impact of quarantine indicate that the pandemic and measures to contain it will have a significant impact upon the mental health of employees, and that in some cases the impact may be long-lasting.

These impacts are likely to be wide-ranging; from significant frustration and a desire to return to a pre-Covid-19 'normal', fear of, or reluctance to accept what becomes the 'new normal', anxiety about family circumstances or financial concerns, through to extreme anxiety about contracting the virus, or passing it to loved-ones.

Six ways in which you can support your teams

1. Communication

Continue to speak to your team, and ask about their wellbeing. Ask them how they are and how they're feeling. Enquire about any concerns they may have, or frustration they're experiencing. Be available to your team should concerns arise. These concerns are likely to vary significantly from person to person, and it's important that you have a picture of both the individuals feelings and that of the team as a whole. Significant differences within or across teams are a potential source of friction.

2. Flexibility

Some of the anxiety already reported relates to very practical challenges such as; child-care arrangements, caring responsibilities, underlying health conditions and living with

those in high-risk categories. Look to be flexible and adapt ways of working to accommodate these challenges wherever possible. If this poses particular challenges, ensure you seek the support available to you from the People Team.

3. Provide Guidance

Ensure that new guidance and procedures are communicated to and understood by the team. Whilst some may find certain aspects frustrating, others will take confidence from the new procedures and precautions being put in place. Manage this closely; regularly recognising and acknowledging adherence and immediately addressing any lapses or breaches.

4. Highlight the support available to your team

Familiarise yourself with, and ensure your team are aware of, the sources of support available to them, such as the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or Mental Health First Aiders.

5. Look out for signs of poor or declining mental health

This may take many forms, but is often most easily described as changes from typical behaviour; mood changes, irritability, nervousness, becoming withdrawn, or particularly talkative or agitated, disruptive or over-reactive behaviour. It might also take the form of working long hours without a break, or increased sickness absence. If you have concerns, have a supportive conversation with the individual, and if necessary utilise the support options available to you through the People Team, Mental Health First Aiders or EAP.

6. Utilise the support available to you

There are resources there to support you, and help you support others. This may be in the form of the People Team (HR, L&D and Health, Safety & Wellbeing), or in organisational Stress Risk Assessments and guidance documents. The EAP provide dedicated support for managers, and there is also the support of fellow managers, or your own line manager who may have experience of similar challenges or circumstances.