



## SUPPORTING EMPLOYEE WELLBEING IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

As we enter into the third year of the pandemic, employees and employers are continuing to navigate these uncertain times. Covid-19 restrictions are requiring employees to juggle their work and life commitments in a variety of circumstances. These could include working from home, working during lockdown, abroad or quarantining in Hong Kong in a home, government location or hotel.

This factsheet aims to provide practical tips to employers and employees to better support their mental health and wellbeing during these unprecedented circumstances.

### HUMAN BEINGS ARE HARD WIRED TO HATE UNCERTAINTY.

We're naturally programmed to want to be in control. It's evolutionary - we crave routine and consistency. Our brain prefers a predictable, negative outcome over an uncertain one. Unfortunately, we tend to focus our time and energy into things that are completely out of our control (like the pandemic), so we continue to feel helpless, which often increases stress and anxiety levels.

If we put our time and energy into worrying about the things that are out of our control, we will continue to feel helpless. **But if we put our time and energy into things we can control or influence, we give ourselves a sense of agency and feel more in control, so this is where we need to focus our time and energy.**

**Dr Sharmeen Shroff, Clinical Psychologist and Director at Central Minds**

### TIPS FOR BUILDING PERSONAL RESILIENCE

- **Prioritise sleep and exercise** to help cope with daily challenges
- **Practise mindfulness** – reframing and paying attention to your emotions
- **Learn from mistakes and failures** – apply what you have learned in a positive way
- **Set specific and achievable personal goals** that align with your values
- **Exercise control over own behaviour** – respond rather than react

### HOW TO MANAGE STRESS: 5 THINGS TO TRY

- 1. Focus on serial mono-tasking:** studies have shown that multitasking makes us less efficient. Instead, assign blocks of time to focus on specific tasks
- 2. Take detachment breaks:** step away from your work at least every 90 minutes to regain focus, restore energy and creativity
- 3. Practise mental agility:** approach situations with greater flexibility by stepping back, pausing and reflecting to identify options, change your perspective and then respond
- 4. Cultivate compassion:** for yourself and others - this increases happiness and reduces stress
- 5. Move mindfully:** breathe, laugh, smile (even if you don't feel like it!), move and relax your body

## CIRCLE OF CONTROL AND INFLUENCE

We often fixate on events or circumstances that are outside of our control. To help manage our stress and anxiety, it may be helpful to take a step back to assess which of our worries are outside of our control and which are within our control and influence.

### What can you control?

- Time spent on news and social media
- How much time you spend on things you enjoy
- Remaining respectful of others
- How you practise sleep hygiene
- Your nutrition and fitness routine

### What can you influence?

- How and when you connect with colleagues and loved ones
- Accessing information from reputable news sources
- Other people's actions

### What do you have little or no control or influence over?

- Government restrictions and policies
- The number of Covid-19 cases
- How long the pandemic will last
- Other people's emotions, motives or opinions



## TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS, MANAGERS AND TEAMS

### 1. PROMOTE YOUR SUPPORT CHANNELS

A prolonged state of stress and uncertainty can bring up a range of difficult emotions. Ensure that your team members are aware of the support resources available, for example Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), insurance coverage, in-house psychological support, webinars and links to resources.

#### How about?

- Adding the details of your EAP or in-house counsellor into the description of your team WhatsApp group.
- If you have spoken to someone via either of these resources; consider sharing your experience with your team during your next team "check-in."

### 2. STAY CONNECTED

Encourage colleagues to stay connected and have regular one-on-one or team check-ins with them via digital platforms. Check-ins should not only focus on the work at hand; allow time for informal discussion. Keep team members informed of any policy changes and how these may affect their specific circumstances. This may cause anxiety so leave space for them to discuss how they feel afterwards.

#### How about?

- Setting aside 10 minutes at the start of your team meeting for everyone to have an opportunity to share how they are feeling. Set the tone by opening up and displaying some vulnerability when you check-in. For ideas on how to structure an informal check-in, click [here](#).
- Finding time to ask and listen to your employee's specific needs and concerns - this may be the best way to start. There is no one-size-fits all solution as different individuals will be tackling different challenges during these uncertain times.

### 3. BE FLEXIBLE AND ADAPTABLE

If your employees are working abroad or from quarantine, be aware of time zones and (where possible) arrange meetings during times that are within normal working hours for all participants. It's likely your colleagues will be using screens to interact with family and friends so try to limit long calls to prevent screen fatigue. It may also be more challenging for your team members to present or conduct external meetings, so consider workload commitments and whether these may need to be adapted accordingly.

#### How about?

- Initiating a "No Zoom" day of the week (or equivalent) and lead by example.
- Trying out a 10 minute "standing meeting" (or walking meeting if that is an option) to work through agenda items. This may boost efficiency and give your team an opportunity to stretch.

### 4. BE SUPPORTIVE OF FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES

To accommodate changes to work arrangements, employees may need to find solutions for childcare, home-schooling or alternative forms of support for dependents. They may be sharing a small apartment or a hotel room with children who may demand their attention during a conference call. Be patient and understanding of unusual circumstances and provide support where possible.

#### How about?

- Sharing tips and resources amongst parents in the team or relevant employee resource group. If you are a parent, consider sharing funny stories about your own experience managing your little ones while working. Your team will appreciate your candour.

### 5. BE AWARE OF FAMILY EMERGENCIES

Consider what support you can offer to team members who may have travelled abroad for a family emergency (or who are unable to travel despite a family emergency) and may be dealing with a wide range of difficult emotions.

#### How about?

- Being aware of the company policies on offer e.g. reduced working hours or paid time off
- Sending a virtual card, gift or team message to show your support.

## 6. ENCOURAGE EMPLOYEES TO PRIORITISE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Employees may de-prioritise their own physical and mental health as they cope with continuous changes to work arrangements or family, work and financial stresses. Encourage colleagues to set healthy boundaries, take breaks, stay active, log-off and rest. It is important that senior managers lead by example.

### How about?

- Setting up a team WhatsApp group and send an update or photo about your daily exercise or wellness break. This will encourage others to reciprocate.
- Encourage your team to “make before they manage”, for example: read an interesting article, complete the daily Wordle, go for a walk. Avoid sending task oriented messages first thing in the morning, instead share how you’ve started your day.

## 7. BE AWARE OF PRE-EXISTING CONDITIONS

Be conscious of team members with pre-existing mental health or other physical conditions (or be aware that you may not know if not disclosed). Consider how you might be able to support them and treat them with compassion and respect.

### How about?

- Schedule a one-to-one to see how they are doing. Ask non-judgemental questions and listen. Share resources if they need them.
- Learn about non-judgmental listening [here](#).

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

- [CMHA HK Coronavirus Resources](#)
- [Mind HK Covid-19 Resources](#)
- [HKU Wellcation Quarantine Wellness Kit](#)



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**City Mental Health  
Alliance** HK

The City Mental Health Alliance Hong Kong (CMHA HK) is a not-for-profit membership organisation. We are an alliance of businesses, working together with mental health experts and partner organisations, to achieve our vision that every workplace will protect, support and create positive mental health for their people.

We provide training, events, resources, research and practical support for companies wishing to create mentally healthy workplaces.

## CONTACT

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