Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) Employees Guide to Remote Work during COVID-19

March 25, 2020

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PURPOSE

Provide TRCA employees with the tools needed to effectively work remotely during the rapidly evolving COVID-19 situation.

Remote work will support TRCA's efforts in:
- Proactively protecting the health and safety of our employees, stakeholders and customers
- Doing our part in preventing further spread of the virus
- Enabling employees to balance work-life priorities during this time
- Continuing to meet our organizational needs

EFFECTIVE REMOTE WORK PERFORMANCE

Maintaining performance

- Reflect on one key question: **What do I need to do to carry out my work while working remotely?**
- **Be creative and suggest tactics** to your supervisor about how you can carry out your work in different ways.
- **Create a workplan** proactively communicate results to your supervisor.
- Create **to-do lists** to stay on track and minimize distractions.

Self-management

- Working remotely might mean that you will work with less supervision. Be mindful about **managing your work and time** to deliver the same results.
- **Schedule a break every day** to prevent isolation and feelings of cabin fever (e.g. go for a walk around the block).
- When working remotely, set up your space to **minimize distractions** and enable you to focus. Make sure you have a specific room or surface for work (i.e. a bed is not an appropriate workspace).
- Despite having less supervision from time to time, it is critical that you **ask for support** from your supervisor or members of the team when you need it.

Maintaining communication

It's easy to take working relationships for granted. Be proactive about communication to **build trust and strong working relationships:**

- Conduct regular **check-ins** with your supervisor and teammates to talk about both work and life.
- **Agree on a work schedule** with your supervisor to meet core hour requirements while also managing work-life balance.
- **Use available technology** to make interactions as human as possible.
- **Avoid an "always on" habit** by setting clear work hours and communicating it to team members.
- When some team members are joining a meeting from different locations, require that **everyone call into the meeting,** including employees in the same location, to level the playing field.

EMPLOYEE REMOTE WORK TIPS

Remote Work Tips
For Employees

💬 Communication & Collaboration

01 — Video chat > voice conferencing or instant messaging
Video chat creates better rapport, shows body language, and lessens feelings of isolation. If it's a quick question, send a message. But for complicated or sensitive topics, always opt for a call or video chat.

02 — Communicate deliberately
Be mindful of tone when using text and avoid ALL CAPS. It is especially important to be honest and open since you can't rely on people picking up how you're feeling from context cues or body language.

03 — Use and respect working sessions
When working remote you can't just close the door or put headphones in when it's time to focus. Use "do not disturb" settings and calendar blocks to set aside time to focus and increase productivity.

04 — Keep work visible
Use shared documents to enable collaboration and feedback without having to visit someone's desk.

📝 Structure

05 — Set touch points with your team and manager
Regular team scrums via videoconferencing keeps everyone in the loop, while weekly 1:1s with your manager builds communication and trust and helps you stay on track. Talk about both work *and* life!

06 — Keep regular hours
It's easy to work longer hours or lose track of time when working from home. Set a schedule and stick to it just like you would at work, otherwise you risk losing work/life balance and burning out.

07 — Follow your regular work routine
That means get dressed! Working in pajamas for one day is fun, but to be productive long-term you need to put yourself in the right mindset for work by getting dressed and following your regular routine.

08 — Take short breaks when needed
Get some fresh air, do some stretches, or take some time to drink your coffee. Use the time to re-energize and come back to your work refreshed and ready to focus.

🏠 Work Environment

09 — Set up a space just for work
Separating office and home is essential. If you don't have a home office, designate a corner of a room or table as your workspace and use it exclusively for that. Set it up as ergonomically as possible.

10 — Avoid distractions
Whenever you're tempted to do household chores or something else unrelated to work or a designated break, write it down on a to-do list for later. Then put it aside and return your focus to work.

REMOTE WORK RECOMMENDATIONS

Structure Plan for Remote Work

Creating a structured workplan can help to increase your productivity, ensure that you are focusing on your priorities of the day, and help to maintain a work-life balance while working remotely. When creating your workplan with your supervisor, consider the following points:

- **Set touch points with your team and supervisor** – regular team meetings using remote technology can help to keep you and your team on track with your priorities.
- **Keep regular hours** – it is easy to work longer hours or lose track of time when working from home. Set a schedule with your supervisor and stick to it like you would at work.
- **Follow your regular work routine –** that means get ready for your workday as normal. Working in pajamas would be great for a few days, but to be productive long-term, getting into the right mindset and following your regular work routine can go a long way in separating work life and home life.
- **Take short breaks when needed –** when you're feeling bogged down, remember to take a short break to do some stretches or get rehydrated. Use the short time away to re-energize and come back to your work refreshed and focused.

Avoid Distractions

Throughout the course of a day, there can be many temptations or distractions that pop up such as household chores. Whenever you are tempted by a distraction or something else unrelated to work or a designated break, write it down on a to-do list for later.

Set up a Space just for Work

Separating the office and the home is essential. If you don't have a home office, designated a corner of a room or table as your workspace and use it exclusively for work. Commit to working in this space every day and do your best to ensure that while you are focusing on your work while in that space.

Effective Communications

Communications is a critical part of working remotely and extends beyond email and use other digital tools that replicate the in-person office experience.

Working remotely means we need to be more concise with how we communicate, including writing clearly and effectively. This is because most of your communication will happen via writing. The most important thing is to be concise, so that you're not making your colleagues wade through a sea of words to get to your point. The clearer you are, the less room you'll leave for misinterpretations and assumptions.

It is also very important to be conscious of tone and choice of words, as without the visual reference, communications can again be misinterpreted.

Safeguarding TRCA Data and Records

TRCA employees that are working from a remote location are to ensure that all digital data and hard copy records are always safe and secure by following these suggestions.

- TRCA computers and hard copy information must be locked away when being transported. They must be stored in the trunk of any vehicle, out of sight and secure.
- Personal information and/or sensitive matters are only viewed by the TRCA employee who is working on that matter. Confidential and sensitive verbal conversations will be conducted in private.
- Employees will not permit third parties (including family members and colleagues) to access TRCA resources
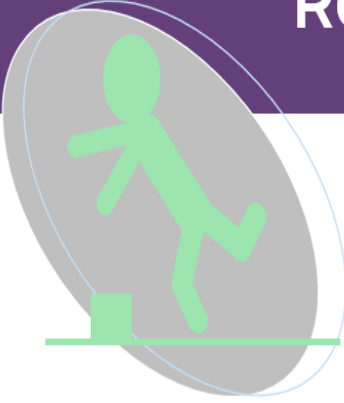
- or information.
- Computers must always be screen-locked (Ctrl + Alt +Del + Lock or WinKey +L) by employees when leaving their device unattended for anytime.
- Use collaboration tools (O365) to avoid having duplicate copies of files.
- All hard copy transitory records and information will be brought back to the worksite and destroyed using TRCA on premises shredding units or placed in carbon neutral shredding bins.
- Sharing data outside the organization requires appropriate agreements are in place and signed.
- Use the TRCA VPN when working remotely.
- Save often!!!....(if your software doesn't do it automatically).

Information Technology Tools

Staff are able to perform regular work duties remotely using the suite of technology tools within the organization. Connecting to the network, sharing files, scheduling and hosting tele and video conferencing, submitting timesheets, accessing applications (IBM Notes, escribe, GIS, CPR, etc.) is all possible and generally speaking quite easy. If you have any questions, issues or suggestions please refer to the resource base of documents on the StaffHub or call the IT Service Desk to speak with someone directly.

Health and Safety while working Remotely

While working remotely, it is critical that you follow the below safety tips and report any accidents that occur while working remotely to your supervisor.

Remote Work Health & Safety

Your safety comes first. Follow these tips to make sure your home workspace is safe.

Keep an eye out for fire hazards

- Check your smoke alarm and carbon monoxide detector to make sure they are working. They should be located where you have fuel-burning appliances.
- You should have a working fire extinguisher meant for multiple hazards.
- Be aware of flammable liquids and paper clutter near electrical heating (e.g. baseboard heaters).

Regular check-ins with your supervisor

- For many people, working at home often means working alone. Working alone, in itself, isn't a risk. But just in case something does happen, it's important to stay connected with supervisor through daily scheduled check-ins.
- Provide your supervisor with contact details of someone who is near you in case there is an emergency.

Watch out for electrical hazards

- Setting up your home office might result in more electronics at home. Check your wiring, outlets, and extension cords to make sure they're in working condition (e.g. no frayed cords).
- Keep electronic cords organized to prevent them from becoming a tripping hazard.
- Don't overload your outlets, and make sure you have surge protection. Connect no more than one power bar or extension cord per outlet, and don't connect multiple power bars or extension cords together.
- Ensure your electronics have sufficient ventilation to avoid overheating.

Look for general hazards

- Inspect your floors to make sure there aren't any hazards such as spilled water, cracks in the floor, or ripped carpets.
- If there are many people at home right now, it's important to be aware of clutter such as children's toys or a partner's work that you can trip on.
- Make sure you have adequate lighting to prevent any unexpected accidents.

Prepare for emergencies

- Create an evacuation plan in case of emergency.
- Make sure you have first-aid supplies and an adequate amount of necessities.
- Keep your emergency contact numbers visible, in one spot. Share this list with your manager.

If you have an incident or accident while working remotely, report it your supervisor immediately.

Breaks

Make sure to take your regular breaks throughout the day as you would in the office. Often times we think that by working from home, we will be able to get more done because there will be fewer distractions. Therefore, sometimes we end up over-committing and working too much, which also negatively impacts productivity. Research shows that taking short breaks can actually increase productivity and creativity levels.

Exercise and Stretch Regularly

Exercise naturally boosts endorphins, which increases happiness, enjoyment, and interest levels, all of which are important for productivity.

Regularly stretching helps you maintain great posture. At a minimum, stretch throughout the day so you don't get sore or hinder your quality of life. If your day allows, when you take your lunch break o for a walk or stretch.

Ergonomics

Ensure you assess your remote workspace using the below tips:

Ergonomic Workspaces

As TRCA shifts to a greater remote workforce during COIVD-19 it is important to assess your workplace using the following tips to create a healthy and safe workspace at home.

Desk

- Make one spot in your home a **designated workspace.** This will help create boundaries between your work and home life.
- Your desk should have **room for your knees, thighs, and feet.**
- If the desk feels hard on your arms, use a soft arm rest or a rolled towel.

Seating

- Make sure your **chair** supports your back. When you sit, your thighs should be parallel to the ground. If you find your knees hunching up, adjust the height of your chair.
- Your **feet should be flat on the floor.** If they aren't, use a footrest to support them. Your footrest can be a pile of books or a small stool.

Monitor

- Put your monitor **directly in front** of you.
- To avoid straining your neck, make sure **the top of the screen is at your eye level.** If you need to raise your screen, use a riser or a stack of books.
- If you have two screens, your brightest light source should be to the side, while your other screen is in front of you.

Keyboard

- Your keyboard should be placed in a way that keeps your arms at or below a 90-degree angle with your elbows by your side and your wrists flat.
- Your mouse should be on the same surface as your keyboard.

Telephone

- Use a **headset** to avoid straining your neck from cradling the phone between your shoulder and ear.

Take breaks

- Get up to walk at least once an hour. Tricks like setting an alarm ensures you get up to move your body.
- Try the **20-20-20 rule.** Every 20 minutes, take a 20-second screen break and look at something at a far distance.
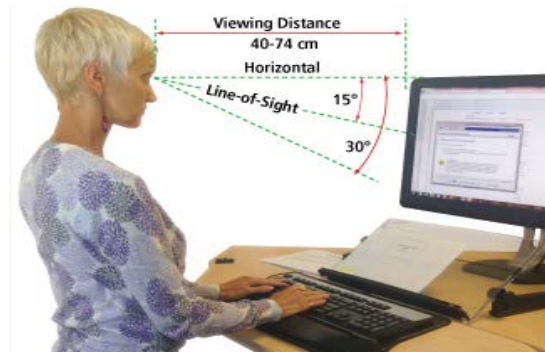
# Use the following examples to set up your remote workspace

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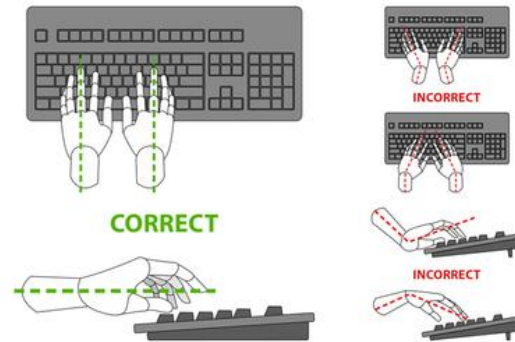
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Eating Healthy

Another remote work reality is that we have full access to the kitchen. So, when it's time for lunch or a snack break, we are immediately drawn to the usual snacks, such as chips, cookies, or leftover pizza.

Research has shown that eating fruits and vegetables has a direct link to overall productivity levels and individual's general health.

Avoiding Isolation

Even with the various technology tools in place, the abrupt nature of the transition from an office to a remote work environment could leave some struggling to get accustomed to the change. It is important to ensure you maintain a regular routine and continue your regular communications with peers, your supervisors.

Look for opportunities with you team to continue regular celebrations – virtual birthday celebrations, praise for peers when they have received project goals etc. Make time for the regular 'water cooler' conversations or 'quick chats'. The more effort you put into communicating with colleagues, the better chance you have of avoiding feelings of isolation.

Make it Personal

Most importantly, find out what works best for you and the situation that you are in. Stay active and hydrated, ensure that you get enough rest and are eating healthy, and incorporate these working from home guidelines to ensure that you maintain a good work-life balance.

It can be hard to remain motivated when you are working from home. Whenever you find yourself needing motivation, evaluate your present situation and make plans for improvements for the future. Take a break, read a book, or get some rest. Sometimes, a bit of rest is all that we need to stay motivated and productive.

Managing your Health & Wellbeing

Wellness and Working Remotely

TRCA is here to support employees during this rapidly changing time!

Your overall health (mental and physical) needs to be a priority. It will not only build your immune system but will help you get through what is a difficult and stressful period for many people.

Physical Health
- **Exercise regularly** – 10-20 minutes a day. Find a physical activity you enjoy such as dancing or riding a bike.
- Find new and innovative ways to pursue your hobbies. Have virtual coffees with friends, watch concerts online, or follow a virtual paint class.
- Eat **healthy** food. WFH and isolating yourself may cause you to fall back on bad habits. Focus on productive and healthy habits.
- Meditate to **take your mind off work** and bring focus back to yourself.
- **Get some daylight and fresh air:** open your shades or go outside. Though you're practicing social distancing, you can still go outside. Just avoid crowds.

Unplug

Meditate

Hobbies

Watch your news consumption
- Manage stress levels by managing news consumption. Avoid or limit watching, reading, or listening to **news** that causes anxiety or distress. "Chase" bad news with lighter material!
- Mitigate misinformation by focusing on sources such as the World Health Organization or your local public health unit.
- Gather information at regular intervals from **trusted and credible** sources.

Look for signs of remote burnout
- Tiredness
- Inability to enjoying things
- Struggling to maintain work performance
- Feeling physically unwell
- Relationships feel strained
- Contributions to work or family are insufficient
- Unable to prioritize family or take breaks

Loneliness is a natural response especially when you're not used to working remotely. Combat this by:
- Staying connected and maintaining your social networks.
- Check in with your colleagues with a video chat through Teams.
- Use electronic platforms such as email, social media, telephone

Create routines and boundaries
- Maintain regular working hours.
- Turn off all your work devices when you're done.
- If you have work apps on your phone, turn off your notifications.
- Stick to a sleep schedule to maintain your energy.
- Set reminders to take breaks, exercise, or connect with someone.
- Set a status to signal when you don't want to be disturbed. Make sure you respect other people's status as well.

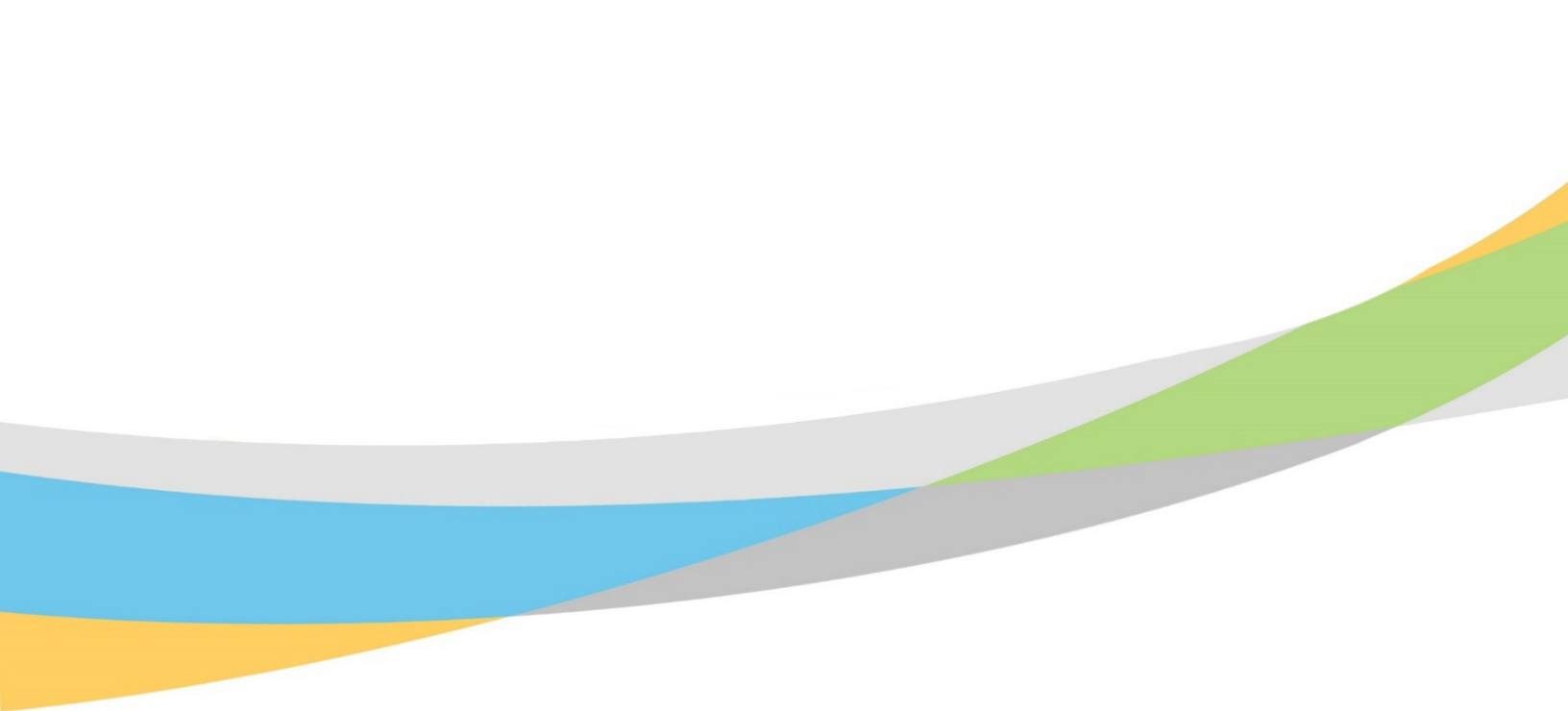## Employee and Assistance Program (EAP)

During this challenging time of uncertainty, we want to remind employees our Employee Assistance Program. This is a confidential forum for employees who could use support and assistance at this time:

ComPsych Guidance Resources
Phone: 844.814.2415
TDD: 877.373.4763
Online: guidanceresources.com
Company web ID: CAEAP

Parenting during this Time of Uncertainty

This time of uncertainty is not only challenging for adults but can also be difficult for children. Below are recommendations to support managing the situation with kids:

- Be calm and proactive. Parents should have a calm, proactive conversation with their children about the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), and the important role children can play in keeping themselves healthy.
- Stick to a schedule. It is important to keep a schedule – kids thrive on routine.
- Let them feel their emotions. Help them get the correct information, talk to them about their worries.
- Create welcome distractions – family game night, meals together, other ways of getting kids off screens as we normally would.
- Lead by example - children rely on their parents to provide a sense of safety and security. Parents should do what they can to manage their anxiety in their own time and to not overshare their fears with their children.

www.trca.ca