



Working from home tips

The Different Travel Company's tips on coping with remote working



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The Different Travel Company's tips on working from home

The Different Travel Company has been successfully operating as a home-based business for over a decade. This e-book is designed to support people who find themselves working from home for the first time and may be struggling with this way of working.



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Perfect your working space

Location

Choose an area that is quiet or has the minimum amount of footfall. If you have a spare bedroom, summerhouse, converted attic or conservatory this may be the perfect spot. If you live in a small house, flat or studio you should pick an area where you can sit at a desk, table or worktop. Ideally it should be a place where you can close a door but if that's not possible, consider hanging a curtain, spare bed sheet or even a (clean) dust sheet to create a divide.

This dedicated space becomes your 'office'. Family members will start to get used to you being 'in the office' and it helps you set up a routine and set expectations for when you can be disturbed.

Lighting

Wherever you select for your workspace, make sure there is good lighting. If you have a window behind you (or in front of you), you may want to close a curtain at certain times of the day to avoid glare on your computer screen or in your eyes. If you close a curtain, make sure you turn on a light or set up a lamp nearby. Don't leave the curtains closed all day.

Organisation

Get organised. Make sure you have everything you need in your work area and keep your workspace tidy. If you're using a workspace that is used for another purpose (e.g. kitchen counter) try to keep the area in your eyeline free from clutter and mess which could distract you or be a slip or trip hazard.

Safety

Set up your workspace safely, following the guidelines set out by the Health and Safety Executive for working with display screen equipment such as computers and laptops. Read the free guide here: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg36.pdf> and follow the tips below:

-Ergonomics

Your workspace should provide enough leg space, and your chair should enable you to bend your knees to achieve a 90° angle.

Maintain good posture. Keeping the natural curve of the spine, head and neck straight and keep your arms, elbows and wrists in neutral positions.

-Fire safety

Your workspace should be kept clean and tidy and avoid burning candles, fragrant oils or incense on, or near your desk. Never leave candles unattended.

Check you fire/smoke alarm is working, and batteries are charged.

Ideally a fire extinguisher or fire blanket should be available.

-Electrical safety

Never daisy chain extension leads (connect one to another).

Always use plugs, cords, outlets that are in a good condition.

Set up the day right

Keep a routine

Maintain your routine. Get up, shower, get dressed, feed the pets, give the kids a hug and pretend you're going into the office, even if it is only behind a curtain in your lounge! Don't stay in your PJs all day.

If you normally walk or cycle to work, why not get some fresh air first thing and do a loop around the block for some fresh air and to continue to create the illusion that you're going to work. If you normally drive to work this can still be a valuable start to the day.

Minimise predicted distractions

Get any domestic chores done before you start the day. Use the time you would otherwise spend commuting to get these things done. Stop your chores 5 minutes before you 'arrive in the office' so you start work on time as normal.

Replicate the office environment

If you are used to working in a busy, bustling office environment it can be quite unsettling to find yourself in a much quieter environment. Listen to music, the radio or even stream 'office background sounds' quietly from YouTube to replicate your regular working environment.

Set expectations

Just because you're working from home doesn't mean you can take personal calls at any time of the day. Let friends and family know you can chat during your lunch break or after work. Working from home is not 'having it easy' although this misconception still abounds.

Keep focused

Plan the day

Start the day reviewing your to-do list or an hourly schedule. Ensure you leave time at the end of the day to review your schedule for tomorrow. Don't forget to schedule regular 5-minute breaks for self-care.

Keep motivated

If you work in a sales or target-based environment, display your weekly or monthly targets in your workspace area.

Stay organised

If you have a whiteboard, chalkboard or pinboard, consider moving this to your workspace so you can make notes, keep your workspace organised and have somewhere to physically look that is away from your computer screen.

Avoid distractions

Try to discipline yourself not to get distracted. This takes time and practice so don't give up or feel bad if you can't manage this straight away.

Keep consistent

Each day will be slightly different but if you set out a solid framework for your working days you will quickly develop the skills to be disciplined and focused.

How to know when to take a break

Listen to your body

It usually becomes apparent when you need to take a break. You start to feel your shoulders aching, you find yourself unable to concentrate, you start skim reading emails or zoning out from calls. Take this as a sign you need to rest. If you've scheduled in some rest breaks, consider the benefit of moving this forward or combining two breaks into one.

Incorporate movement throughout your day

Do 10 squats between each call, or once every 1-2 hours, to boost energy and sneak in some movement. Use the NHS 5-minute wake up workout stretches for a movement break <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/5-minute-wake-up-workout/>.

Get away from your desk

Ideally you should give yourself a 5-minute break once an hour to get away from the computer screen and rest your eyes. Make a cuppa. If you have some outside space, go outdoors. If you don't have a garden or patio, open a window for a blast of fresh air.

Total escape

When you're taking a break make sure you turn your phone to silent, switch off your email client and walk away from your workspace so you have some physical separation between your work and relaxation areas and have time to gather your thoughts without distractions of phones ringing or email notifications pinging.

Schedule rest

If you are someone who gets absorbed in a task and forgets to eat, drink or rest, set an alarm on your phone to remind you to stop for lunch or a tea break. While it may feel like you're breaking your flow, fresh eyes on a task are always best.

Allow constructive distractions

If you are distracted, be disciplined about making that distraction your allotted 5-minute rest. E.g. if the dishwasher is beeping, the laundry needs hanging on the washing line or the postman rings the doorbell, allow yourself no more than 5 minutes once an hour to address these then get straight back to work. Ideally, schedule these things into your working day so they become part of your routine.

Keep in contact

Keep up morale

It can feel lonely working from home, so clear and consistent communication is essential to working remotely not just for productivity but also for sharing knowledge, helping each other with problems, still feeling like part of a team, and keeping morale up.

Keep the right people in the loop, at the right time

As you can't walk across the office to ask a colleague a question you need to keep in touch without bombarding your colleagues with queries. Copy relevant colleagues into email correspondence that applies to them.

Equally you need to avoid spamming your colleagues with communications that are irrelevant. If an email chain becomes irrelevant to someone included in the conversation, remove them and send them a note to explain you've done it, but that you'll keep them posted if the conversation becomes relevant again.

Schedule regular calls as a team

Skype or Zoom are great channels as you can opt for a video call which allows everyone to feel a little more like they're in the room with other people. It also allows each other to look out for tell-tale signs that someone is having a bad day or not coping, by noticing their body language, tone of voice and other subtle cues.

Remember language is subjective

Be careful when you're writing emails or texts where the tone could be misinterpreted. It can be easy to upset someone if you are not careful with your tone of voice.

Eat and drink mindfully

Snacking

Snacking is often related to boredom or escapism rather than genuine hunger, so it is important to eat mindfully. Plan out your meals for the working day. Do you normally have a mid-morning snack? What type of lunch do you have? Prepare those snacks and meals in advance and schedule them into your day. Have a treat to look forward to.

Eat mindfully

If you do stop for a snack, don't take the whole container to your workspace. Put the snack onto a plate, take 5 minutes away from your computer and enjoy it. If you take the entire container of snacks to your desk and work while you eat you risk mindlessly grazing. This is particularly true on stressful workdays.

Keep hydrated

Staying adequately hydrated is also key to avoiding snacking. It's easy to mistake thirst for hunger so keep a bottle of water in your workspace and take regular sips.

Avoid too much caffeine

Try to avoid too many caffeinated beverages such as tea, coffee and cola drinks which can disrupt your sleep and cause unfavourable physiological responses such as gastric irritation, increased heart rate, restlessness and nervousness.

Learn how to switch off

Keep work items out of sight

At the end of the day make sure you shut down your laptop and move it out of sight (or leave it in another room), so you are not tempted to 'just check one more thing' in the evening. Unless you are on-call during evenings and/or weekends, switch off your work phone or direct calls to voicemail and only keep it on during working hours.

Avoid using personal devices for work purposes

If possible, use another device (such as your phone/iPad) for browsing the internet, looking at social media etc. in the evenings or weekends, rather than using your work computer. Also avoid the temptation to set up your work emails on your personal phone.

Manage expectations with your clients and colleagues

If they contact you out of working hours for a non-urgent work-related query, let them know you will respond the next working day. This creates healthy barriers for you and sets expectations for them. Being 'open all hours' can be detrimental to your productivity and mental health.

Consider the feelings of your family members

If you work from home and your spouse, partner or housemate does not, it can be difficult to relate to each other's struggles and this can cause resentment and arguments. Share how your day was but be considerate of the other person.

Keeping healthy

Be honest

It can be challenging working remotely, especially if you have a stressful and demanding job and are balancing caring for children. If you need help, ask for it. If you need to take an extra hour off, let your colleagues know. It's extremely important to keep your mental health protected.

Draw on coping skills from past experiences

Draw on skills you have used in the past that have helped you to manage previous adversities and use those skills to help you manage your emotions.

Look out for each other

During your conference calls, Skype chats and Zoom conversations, take notice of how your colleagues are interacting. Are they quieter than usual? Do they look more tired? Are they using negative language more frequently? Do they appear anxious or jittery? Are they putting their head in their hands or sighing a lot? These are all indications that something isn't quite right. If you feel you have the capacity to do so, send a text, private message or email to that person and invite them to talk to you about how they're feeling. If you don't feel able to start that conversation, let a trusted colleague know your concerns so they can have the discussion instead.

If you're not coping

If you feel overwhelmed, anxious, depressed or not like your usual self, speak to your manager who can help signpost you to a number of organisations who can support you. You can also call your doctor, reach out to a counsellor or speak to a mental health organisation such the Samaritans visit <https://www.samaritans.org/>, call 116 123 (free) or email jo@samaritans.org.

Caring for children (and pets)

The current COVID-19 crisis means that entire families are now spending a lot more time together. Couples are working in the same room as their children and pets are learning and playing. It's stressful and overwhelming.

Keep flexible

Allow some flexibility to work around what the kids are doing and don't feel guilty for spending structured supervised time with them.

Help children identify a place where they can retreat if they feel stressed. Why not create a pillow fort in the lounge, or a duvet fort in their bedroom? Even when it feels like we are on top of each other, it's important to have a space where you can have some time alone.

Allow some independence

Set children tasks they can complete on their own. There are numerous free resources available including home schooling packs, PE classes with Joe Wicks etc.

Structure your day

Give yourself a proper lunch hour but spend that time with children and/or pets. If you need to give them a couple of hours in the morning, shift your work schedule so you put in some solid hours once they've gone to bed.

Divide and conquer

If there are two of you, share the caring, educating, playing workload. One of you work all morning, the other all afternoon.

Get the kids involved

If your type of work allows it and it is appropriate, allow your children (and/or pets!) to quietly join in on conference calls or watch you work. Not only does it give children a feeling of being included but it also demonstrates your good work ethic. Set up a desk for your child near yours, with colouring books, puzzles etc. so you can 'work' together.

Set up a conference call for your children

Schedule a video conference for your children with your children's friends. During this time of social distancing, children miss their friends. Allowing them time to hello to each other and chat gives you some time to concentrate on your work, while keeping them entertained.

Don't feel guilty about screen time

If you need to stick on a movie to give you a couple of hours of solid work time, that's okay!

We hope you find these tips useful. If you have any of your own to add, send us an email on info@different-travel.com.