



# **Surrey Fire and Rescue Service**

## **Guide to Working from Home**

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**SURREY**

## Some tips for working remotely and self-isolation

In light of the Government announcement, we find ourselves in a position where we are experiencing a form of forced isolation and being asked to adhere to social distancing rules for everybody's safety. We understand this time is a challenging one, especially when we find ourselves with little choice.



It is appreciated that one of the hardest things about working from home, especially if you're used to an office environment, is the disruption of routine which can result in a sense of loneliness and isolation. That's especially true in the current social distancing rules which mean isolation hasn't been chosen.

A change in routine is always challenging, and it is respected that some find the transition more difficult than others. The rules concerning social distancing may

impact on our support network, whilst also making the network we do have even smaller which may not present an ideal situation.

We advise that we can all take the following steps to help create a feeling of unity:

- Reach out to people you work with, especially those who may be having especially difficult times
- Do what you can to engage socially with the rest of the team whenever possible through skype and WhatsApp and you also need to ring them individually sometimes
- Get out of the house for a walk or some other form of exercise
- **Communicate a lot** and remember birthdays and other team moments so that colleagues do not feel distanced.

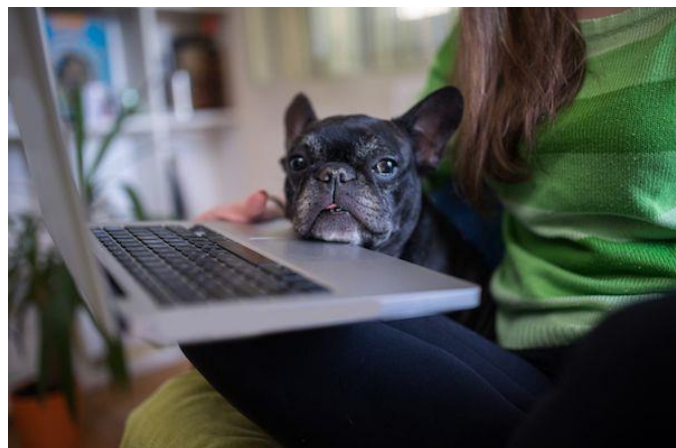
Working from home will result in communication being over email, Skype and phone, thus limiting the social element and face to face contact. When writing to colleagues, remember that often communication can be lost in communication; the use of '!' can be perceived as too harsh when finishing a sentence. It is suggested that to soften communication that we employ the use of emoji's and re-read the content of an email or other written mode to ensure that it carries the right tone.

Suggestions to help you in this time include the following:

**Ensure that you have a routine.** Try and maintain a routine as close to the one you observed in your work place as possible.

**Get dressed and ready to start your day.** This will help you manage yourself in terms of getting ready for your day and also mean that you're not sat in your PJs when on a skype call, thus maintaining that professional image.

**Make time for small talk.** When working remotely, it's easy to just talk about what needs to get done and jump off your call, end your chat, and get back to executing. Sometimes you need to but not every time.



**Use video as much as you can.** This will assist in each of s feeling less isolated.

**Have longer 121s.** Since you don't have all those moments in the office to build rapport and talk about issues ad hoc, make up for it by setting aside more time for your 121s with each other or your

manager. Please talk to colleagues if any issues arise as a result of distancing yourself from colleagues, friends and family – sometimes talking to someone will help you resolve the feelings or issue yourself.

## Here are a variety of remote-specific questions

Because of the unique challenges that working remotely can bring it's important to have questions on hand that help dive into some of those issues that they might be dealing with. Chances are, remote work may make them become more and more isolated.

- *How are you?*
- *How are you finding being at home?*
- *What's your daily routine like for your working life?*
- *Do you feel included in our team decisions? If not, why not? What can I do to change this?*
- *How are the tools we use as a team working out for you remotely? (e.g. are they disabled team members struggling with poor audio on Skype meetings or struggle using any tools the team uses?)*
- *Which of your colleagues do you wish you had more of a connection with? How can I help with that?*

## Take regular breaks and cut off from work

When you don't have colleagues interrupting you, it can be easy to stay at your desk way longer than is healthy. Make sure you schedule in some regular breaks where you get up from your desk and move around. That might mean grabbing more coffee, taking a short walk, or moving from one location to another.

If you have issues with remembering to take breaks, set a timer for yourself.

It's important to finish work as if you were leaving an office and cut off, take the weekend and also consider taking annual leave if this will help you to adjust to the recent changes.



## Create a way of working which is balanced for you and the people you live with

When you're working solo a lot of the time, you're much less tied into the way other people expect you to work. It is still therefore important to maintain that routine.

If you live with others, it is recommended that you establish clear times when you are working and when you are available, however, not to be frustrated if those times are interrupted.

## Create a space for work that you can step away from

Working from home can create a blurred line between what is work and what is home. If you can, create a space for work, whether that's at your kitchen table or a desk somewhere in the house.

Packing up & putting away your work at can help bring the work day to a close, as opposed to the setup becoming a constant.

## For Managers

## Manage Expectations

Help your team figure out what they can and can't do, and create realistic expectations for their work. By the way, "managing expectations" applies to you as a manager as well. Set yourself and your team up for success by clearly stating both the tasks that can be achieved working remotely and the reasons behind them, and help your team understand how you will measure success.

That means defining the scope, deadlines, and deliverables for each task or project your team is working on. Otherwise, don't be surprised if a few weeks from now you find yourself wondering what everyone was doing.

## Focus on Outcomes, not Activity

It's not possible to manage every aspect of the work done by a remote team. For what it's worth, you shouldn't be trying to manage every aspect of any team's work, but especially when your team is distributed across different locations. Instead of focusing on activity or hours worked, focus on the outcomes and measure your team accordingly.

## Be Flexible

Understand that, especially in the current environment, your team has a lot going on. That's not an excuse for not getting things done, but it is a reason to reconsider what productivity really means. Regular work hours are probably out for many people. Instead, trust your team and give them the freedom and flexibility to get work done on the schedule that helps them be the most productive. We appreciate this is a new way of working, but this is an ideal opportunity for us all to embrace and grow as a Service.



## Useful Contacts

If any of our staff appear to be struggling, there is support out there which managers and colleagues can signpost them to, a small selection of the help available is:

[Employee Assistance Helpline](#) (delivered through Optima Health) – Freephone 0800 731 8631

[Surrey County Council](#)

[Young minds](#) – talking to your children about COVID-19

[Age UK](#) – if you have elderly family that need your support

[Sport England](#) – for top tips for exercising at home

[Mental Health Foundation](#) – lots of info on staying well and looking after you