



United Nations  
**OMBUDSMAN**  
and Mediation Services

# Tips for working well during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has a strong impact on the work of all of us, as working from home or other places virtually for a longer period is a new experience for many. It requires finding out together how to best organize your teamwork and how to communicate.

The United Nations Ombudsman is sharing with you tips to help you and your team members stay connected in a meaningful way and create a positive work atmosphere while online. This complements guidelines already issued by the Organization and highlights potential areas of workplace conflict that have come to our attention.

## 1. Get organized for teamwork: Let's talk to each other!

Every working day, at a fixed time, exchange about work: what's on, what are the plans and what are the achievements expected. Review together what needs to get done and how to make things happen. Find solutions together, taking into consideration the hurdles that working from home and online bring. Redistribute tasks where necessary.

## 2. How do you cope? Check in with your team!

Just as important: check in on how everyone is doing. How are you and your team members feeling? What are the challenges of working from home? What does the increased movement restrictions mean for you and your families? This check-in is very important: all of us are facing new realities and are trying to cope. Some of us are single parents; others are alone and away from their home countries. Many cannot have a separate space to work from at home. These are all issues that affect work and morale, and the expectations we can have of each other. Be open about how things are for you and what your possibilities and limitations are.

## 3. A new challenge: Working at home with kids

Parents of school-aged children are facing additional responsibilities to home-school their kids. Children need to stay active and entertained, and require regular attention, which might lead to interruptions in online meetings and affect their parents' ability to focus or impact their work schedules. Supervisors and other colleagues, please be aware of this and support those parents. Flextime and work redistribution are needed in addition to working from home.

## 4. Giving time and space to adjust – it's a new situation for many!

Everyone deals differently with the situation of being constantly at home. And everyone deals differently with the COVID-19 developments, and with their own stress and concerns. These are coping mechanisms. Please remember to be kind to each other, including if someone is overbearing or argumentative. The key word is empathy and the key action is finding out what someone needs. Give everyone their own rhythm to adapt. Talk with your team or a trusted colleague about things that concern you. If you are a supervisor, provide some structure by having regular meetings and one-on-ones where needed.

## 5. Communication is key!

Communicate about work planning, deadlines and expectations for each staff. Some team members might have less work, whereas some might see an increase in their tasks to coordinate online, or make up for a backlog, or

take over from a colleague with children. Any change in work, projects and responsibilities needs to be clearly communicated to prevent wrong expectations and miscommunications. Remember that, from miscommunication, you can easily slide into misunderstanding, irritation, misinterpretation, and conflict.

## 6. Virtual coffees

Have coffee and lunch or any social interactions with your colleagues as you would normally. Or start this now. Have a 15-minute coffee break, a half-hour lunch date, together and online! There are many great tools to connect with people virtually, and while of course the feeling will not be exactly the same as sitting together around a table in person, meeting our colleagues online helps a lot to cope with the current situation.

## 7. Support each other

Listen to each other's concerns, whether work related or private, without judgement. Express your own worries. Be vulnerable. Now is not the time to clamp up and be 'tough'. Now is the time to open up and connect through our own personal stories of how this situation is for us. What it does to us. And to offer help to each other. Share with others what you have already gone through and help them cope with challenges you have already faced (and managed!).

## 8. Job security?

There is insecurity around contracts: will there be extensions for everyone? What about planned funding of projects? Can all planned projects still be accomplished? If you are worried about these points, raise them with your supervisor – they might be able to clarify things despite the unclear situation at the moment. For colleagues in supervisory positions, a clear and timely communication with your staff is key: be sensitive to the insecurities about work and contracts your team members might have and flexible about solutions. Tell your staff you are proud to work with them and of the way they are keeping up with the work to be done.

## 9. Time to catch up

While the workload fulfilling your mandate may not be decreasing, maybe you now have some extra time and flexibility due to the cancellation of travel or a training. This is an excellent moment to catch up on important tasks that might otherwise fall through the cracks! Think about the new office strategy, the development of standard operating procedures within your team, improved outreach materials or the new digitalization strategy in your office.

## 10. A time for kindness and restoring office kinship

The current situation opens up a space for personal reflection about what is truly important in our lives, which also touches on the roles we play at work. As our usual ways of interacting with one another are disrupted, we may become more conscious of the value of each other's presence in our professional lives and the essence of what enriches our relations at work. Remember: small acts of kindness go a long way! This is a moment to express our appreciation of one another, a compliment, or to share words of kindness and gratitude, and to bring a smile to the face of your colleague and a sense of connectedness despite the physical distance.

***Struggling with the new situation? Or is an old unresolved issue bothering you?*** The Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services is here to support you with any workplace concern. Please get in touch with us at [unoms@un.org](mailto:unoms@un.org) for a one-on-one, confidential conversation via MS Teams, Skype for Business, Signal, etc.



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To discuss a workplace issue, please contact:  
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