

SUPPORTING HEALTHY SOCIAL CONNECTION

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Connection is vital to maintain health and thriving as humans. As a matter of fact, connection-experiencing positive, trusting relationships with others—is [one of the seven areas of human needs](#) that WELCOA recommends organizations support when creating successful workplace wellness initiatives. Feeling a sense of belonging, acceptance and support has some very compelling outcomes when it comes to our mental health, longevity and chronic disease prevention.

The irony about ‘social distancing’ is that we are, and need to be, more socially connected than ever before. As we connect virtually for meetings, we are connected into people’s homes where they are existing with their families who may or may not pop in during a meeting. If managed well, this time can be an opportunity to foster deeper human connections with each other and maintain new and stronger cultures for belonging and connection in our organization. Here are some tips for managing social connections during a difficult time.

Keep It Positive

The intensity of our social connection is increased due to this situation. It is imperative to focus not just on social connection, but on healthy social connection. This is a time when some people may feel warranted, due to the stress, to be firm, aggressive, passive aggressive or rude. If you see this happening in your company you can compassionately address it. The below example provides language that everyone can use regardless of their level in the company.

EXAMPLE: ADDRESSING UNHEALTHY SOCIAL INTERACTION

If you find someone engaging in unhealthy social interaction, try addressing it by saying the following.

“I want to acknowledge that these are very stressful times. I can see that you are feeling frustrated by the situation. I want to remind you that it is more imperative than ever that we maintain respectful communication for everyone.”

Foster Joy through Connection

While we need to be aware of the challenging dynamics of social connection, we also need to facilitate healthy, joyful social connection. There are several ways in which you can have a little fun right now. Here are a few quick-win ideas.

1. Some people are jokingly calling their pets and kids “co-workers” and sharing funny comments about what working from home is really like. Encourage your team to share (via email, internal chat or video conference) funny and real-life examples of their experience.
2. Create a company specific hashtag to share fun things among employees within the company.
3. Join together as a team or company in supporting some of the efforts to help those more gravely impacted by this pandemic. For example, raising money to support a local business, donating blood, or helping out the local food bank to provide food to those in need. Doing so as a group helps everybody come together to focus on a common good.

Be Intentional

During this time of social distancing, with many employees working remotely from their homes, the frequent connections that just organically happen during a work day are no longer going to happen by chance. In Module 7, *Resources For Managers To Support Their Teams*, strategies for managing remote workers with the right types of check-ins were provided. Another important element of remote check-ins is that they might be the only source of connection that an isolated employee has during this time. Here are three great ideas to maximize social connection among your team and organization as a whole.

1. **Make the majority, if not all, meetings video chat meetings.** Systems like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, LogMeIn and many others provide great video conferencing capabilities for organizations. Many of these have free versions that you can access right away.
2. **Schedule multiple all-team check-ins throughout the day.** Consider scheduling a video conference meeting at the beginning of the day and another at the end of the day so that everyone will have the opportunity for face-time with their colleagues.
3. **Take time to actually connect.** Before getting into the flow of meetings, go round robin among all attendees and do a check-in on how they are feeling. Try prompts like “how’s your head?”, “how’s your heart?” and “how’s your health?” to get team members to speak openly about how they are coping.

During these unique times, we are balancing our families, our work, and our social media apps all at the same time. It can be challenging and overwhelming. While it is important to encourage employees to take a break from being constantly available to avoid burnout, being deliberate about fostering the right types of social connection will improve employee engagement and morale as we all work together to manage issues related to COVID-19 at work.

