6 WAYS TO ...
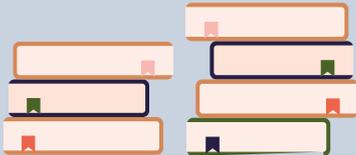
Switch off when working from home

WFH can easily spill over into evenings and weekends. How can you restore boundaries?

Written by ROBERT SANDERS

SHUTTERSTOCK, LISA MALTBY

WORKING FROM HOME works really well for some people. But many EHPs – used to being in offices and spending time out and about in their local areas – have been thrust into it with little warning or time for preparation. When you're not used to it, home-working can start to dominate your whole life. So how can you switch off, if you're always on? Fortunately, it is possible to build in behaviours that will save your sanity.

1. IT'S NOT ABOUT CLOCK-WATCHING

We are so used to seeing our time as the asset for which our employer pays us, but it's our knowledge, skills and experience that make the difference. Without the day-to-day distractions of office life, you can often achieve far more when working from home. Try to set yourself three key outcomes for each day that lead to your weekly goals. If you can achieve most of these then you are doing a good job, regardless of the hours you put in.

2. SET CLEAR BOUNDARIES

Agree with your partner, your children and yourself what your core working hours will be. Set a schedule that works for you and stick to it. Some days will be more productive than others (just as they are in the workplace). Concentrate on maintaining the habit so it becomes second nature.

3. MAKE APPOINTMENTS WITH YOURSELF AND YOUR LOVED ONES

If you are having a meeting with colleagues, you book an appointment in your diary, and know you won't be working at that time. So why

WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO TO HELP WORK-LIFE BALANCE?

1. SET AN EXAMPLE
Make sure you are not eating into staff's time with phone calls and emails sent out of hours. Respect their time (and your own).

2. OFFER TECHNICAL ADVICE AND TRAINING
Make sure staff know how to use 'auto-replies', 'out of office' and other notifications. Or provide 'work-only' equipment so that it is easier to shut it out at the end of the day.

3. GIVE CLEAR EXPECTATIONS
Make your expectations clear in relation to time and quality of work so staff don't feel they are on a treadmill.

How to switch off when WFH

not schedule time for non-work things too? Quality time with others is extremely important, but easy to put off. Arrange a film night, book in a call with your family, or schedule a Zoom quiz with friends. If it's in the diary, it happens.

4. LITERALLY UNPLUG

Whether you have a daily nine-to-five, or need to work around family or children, you need to prevent yourself being dragged back into the work world. If your mind is on your work, even briefly, you are not giving yourself recovery time. So, take advantage of technology. Turn off notifications, redirect calls and set up auto-replies. This will help to avoid the temptation to solve every little problem out of hours.

5. TALK LIKE YOU MEAN IT

When you communicate with others, throw in phrases like 'at close of play', 'when I finish today' and 'until I switch everything off'. Say these sorts of things in your own mind when you are managing your activities. It will help to programme your mind – and that of others – to recognise that there is a time in each day when work stops.

6. BELIEVE IN MIRACLES

If you find that work bleeds into the evenings, it can be productive to book in 'me-time' for things like self-development, mindfulness and exercise before the working day starts. In his book *The Miracle Morning*, author Hal Elrod recommends using the first hour of the day – getting up earlier if necessary – for vital activities such as exercise, reading and writing.

◯ Robert Sanders is a therapist and coach in West Sussex. www.robertsanders.me.uk

COVID conversations

CIEH has been hosting a series of webinars on the impacts of the coronavirus across environmental health. Steve Smethurst picks out a few highlights

PESTS

WE MAY FACE AN EXPONENTIAL RISE IN PESTS

"Where there have been closed premises there's high risk if there's been food, water, harbourage and no human activity. There are signs there's been an increase in populations. If a restaurant had 10 fertile female cockroaches on the premises at the time of closure, then two months on there could be another 600. If you left a pregnant mouse on its own for 12 weeks, you could end up with 65 mice by the time you returned."

FACTOR IN THE FEAR FACTOR

"Some people will have a terror of letting anybody into their houses. If you're shielding, the last thing you need is somebody coming in to deal with a cockroach, for example, but it may mean so many people are just putting up with a problem, which will only get worse."

PUBLIC HEALTH

ELIMINATE RISK USING TIME

"When you're talking about PPE in relation to EHOs, you can eliminate the risk by using time. For example, 72 hours elapsing would allow you to put distance between you and the source of infection."

MESSAGE FATIGUE

"You can only say the same message for so long before the way in which it's delivered has to change. I work with a company that monitored soap use in toilets against footfall – it found only 50% of workers in large office blocks wash their hands after going to the toilet. It improved when people were made aware of the monitor, and when they made it a competition between the floors they got it to more than 90%. There's a system in Denmark that screams at you if you don't wash your hands, which is, you know, quite fun."

FRUSTRATIONS BUILD

"People with mental health problems are often isolated, living in poor areas in poor accommodation. If they're stuck in their flats for weeks, it will not help. There'll be plenty of people who may not have had mental health problems before the lockdown. Distressingly, there's a lot of issues around increased violence and domestic abuse."

NOISE AND NUISANCE

COMPLAINTS ARE CHANGING

"Most noise complaints now relate to antisocial behaviour issues. Statutory nuisance gives us certain pathways but it seems people are drinking more and there are increased stresses and strains within homes and relationships. This stuff is quite difficult to deal with within the statutory nuisance approach."

A ROLE FOR EHPs

"EHPs are central. At the moment there are no formal and systemic arrangements for catching noise and noise pollution data on a UK-wide basis. If we can harness that information and get it fed into a central point, it will put us in a powerful position to petition government about measures that need to be taken."

HOUSING

UPDATE YOUR ENFORCEMENT POLICIES

"It's important to update any enforcement policies so people can understand how the local authority is going to deal with disrepair, complaints or HMO licensing, for example, and making sure that that information is disseminated to the right people. There are always landlords and tenants who don't necessarily communicate effectively with the local authority and it's important that we get the message out."

PRIORITISE COMPLAINTS AND ADAPT YOUR COMPLAINTS PROCESS

"We're adapting our processes for dealing with complaints. We want tenants to provide photographs or video evidence so that we can do a desktop risk assessment before we decide whether it's appropriate to visit. We're also considering the use of suspending notices and considering de-prioritising Category 2 hazards, so not actually dealing with the less serious housing matters."

HEALTH AND SAFETY

WHEN TO REPORT COVID-19 UNDER RIDDOR IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

"You only have to report under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) if an unintended accident at work has led to someone's possible or actual exposure; if a worker has been diagnosed as having COVID-19, and there's reasonable evidence that it was caused by exposure to work; and if a worker dies as a result of occupational exposure."

TAKE SIMPLE PRECAUTIONS

"Large organisations have access to guidance and support from their insurer, but some councils are writing to all clubs – golf, rugby, football, cricket and gyms – and specifically suggesting that they flush their systems and clean shower heads before they use them again, which is good practical advice."