



Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion Centre canadien pour la diversité et l'inclusion

Inclusive leadership guide: Supporting your women employees working at home during the pandemic

We are not working from home during a crisis.

We are living through a crisis, while trying to work at home.

For those employees who have not worked from home in the past or who have only done it occasionally, this is a struggle on many fronts, and the situation is having an impact on everyone. That impact can be different, depending on your gender.

Research has shown that although gender roles are evolving both in the workplace and at home, there is still a different experience for, and expectation of, women who work, in the office and at home. Women continue to shoulder more of the responsibilities for childcare, educational support, emotional nurturing, eldercare, and household management.ⁱ This directly translates to different impacts on women, especially given the added complexity and stress of the current world pandemic.

How can you support your women colleagues, team members, and employees who are working from home during this pandemic?

- A. **Be curious:** Although we may all be in the same storm; we are not all in the same boat. Everyone has a unique situation while working at home and gender contributes to this.
 - » Do: Ask open-ended questions to invite her to offer context to her situation. E.g.: “*What are your challenges in being able to work effectively or productively from home?*”
 - » Don't: Make light of the gendered burden. E.g.: Making jokes about getting all the laundry done or having a super clean house.
- B. **Be an active listener:** If you invite her to tell you about her challenges, then listen.
 - » Do: Acknowledge that you are hearing what she is saying: E.g.: “I hear you; that must be really challenging”; or by paraphrasing: E.g.: “If I am hearing you correctly, you are saying that...”
 - » Don't: Tell your story as a way of showing her that you understand exactly what she is experiencing. This is not about you, but about her challenges and the impact on her.
- C. **Be flexible:** Focus on establishing what she needs, for her to feel that she is contributing in a valued way.
 - » Do: Focus on the progress in completing work and what kinds of strategies she is using to manage work life and home life. Have some recommended ways to establish a productive workspace and set boundaries around how and when work will be doneⁱⁱ,

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while recognizing that women are more likely to be the one that children or elders seek out at unpredictable times, for support, care and attention.

- » Don't: Assume that a regular workday of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. is possible or attainable, particularly if she is living with, or caring for, children or elders.
- D. Be aware:** The combined impact of the pandemic, working in your home, and increased responsibilities at home creates different experiences for women in general. Further, diversity among women can create unique experiences due to the intersection of different aspects of their identity. Keep these things in mind during check-ins or during virtual meetings.
 - » Personal dimensions of diversity:
 - Is she pregnant or nursing? ⁱⁱⁱ
 - Does she live with a disability? ^{iv}
 - Are there elderly parents living with her or for whom she is responsible for? ^v
 - Does she have a spouse/partner who is an essential worker/health-care worker? ^{vi}
 - Are there any indications that she is living in an abusive relationship? ^{vii}
 - » Microaggressions at work ^{viii}
 - Micro-managing: Are you checking in with your women employees more often than the men?
 - Acknowledging the “owner of ideas”: Are women employees given credit for their ideas/contributions?
 - One-on-one meetings: Are you making any assumptions about a woman's living arrangements, e.g.: gender of a spouse/partner?
 - Nurturing/caring support: Are your women employees taking on the care and support of other employees more so than men? Do they feel that they are expected to do so?
- E. Be supportive:** The impact of this global crisis is impacting all of us in physical, emotional, and mental ways, including you. Be kind to yourself and to your women employees who may be experiencing additional or complex stressors due to their unique identities. ^{ix}
 - » Refer her to benefits provided by the company (e.g.: Employee and family assistance programs) or check out some of the resources at the Canadian Mental Health Association.
 - » Use this opportunity to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health by speaking openly and compassionately about mental health challenges during this time.
 - » Communicate regularly and consistently about mental health and supports available.
 - » Show empathy and implement the behaviours listed above to demonstrate that you are an inclusive leader.

**Endnotes include sources indicated in the text above.*



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- i "How Emotional Labor Affects Women's Careers" *Forbes*. Retrieved from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/melodywilding/2018/06/06/dont-be-the-office-mom-how-emotional-labor-affects-womens-careers/#777bce8f1103>
- ii "Working from home during the Coronavirus pandemic. What you need to know." *Forbes*. Retrieved from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/vickyvalet/2020/03/12/working-from-home-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic-what-you-need-to-know/#6e2e840b1421>
- iii "Q&A on COVID-19, pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding" *World Health Organization*. Retrieved from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-on-covid-19-pregnancy-childbirth-and-breastfeeding>
- iv "Covid-19: Useful Resources for Persons with Disabilities" *Rick Hansen Foundation*. Retrieved from: <https://www.rickhansen.com/news-stories/blog/covid-19-useful-resources-persons-disabilities>
- v "Coronavirus (COVID-19) Resources and Articles for Family Caregivers" *Family Caregiver Alliance*. Retrieved from: <https://www.caregiver.org/coronavirus-covid-19-resources-and-articles-family-caregivers>
- vi "How companies can support their employee caregivers during the COVID-19 outbreak" *Fastcompany*. Retrieved from: <https://www.fastcompany.com/90480199/how-companies-can-support-their-employee-caregivers-during-the-covid-19-outbreak>.
- vii "Signal for Help" *Canadian Women's Foundation*. Retrieved from: <https://canadianwomen.org/signal-for-help/>
- viii "Ask SGO: Microaggressions in the virtual world" *YouTube*. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EuU7BB-m1nk>
- ix "5 Ways to support your employees' mental health during a pandemic" *Forbes*. Retrieved from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alankohll/2020/04/20/5-ways-to-support-your-employees-mental-health-during-a-pandemic/#365b1b996892>