

Lyra



MANAGER'S GUIDE

Supporting Your Remote or Hybrid Team's Mental Health



Where and how people work has drastically changed in the past few years. Spurred by the need to social distance amid COVID-19's spread, companies quickly shifted employees who could work remotely out-of-office. In May 2020, as many as [70 percent](#) of remote-capable employees were working exclusively from home compared to just 8 percent pre-pandemic. This meant teams had to quickly adapt as they found new ways to hold meetings, collaborate, and manage their workloads.

Now, with most restrictions lifted and people returning to in-person interactions, the door has reopened for companies to decide how they want to operate. Three main models have emerged for how remote-capable employees can work:

- **In-office:** Employees function in the traditional model of 100 percent in-office work.
- **Remote:** Employees have full autonomy to work from wherever they find most productive and convenient.
- **Hybrid:** This model combines remote and office work in a way that offers flexibility for both employers and employees.

A [recent survey from Gallup](#) showed that 59 percent of remote-capable employees preferred working in a hybrid model, citing reasons such as flexibility, balance, and feeling connected to their organization. Another 32 percent preferred to work remotely while only 9 percent said they'd rather be fully on-site.

Of surveyed workers:



prefer hybrid work



prefer fully remote work



prefer in-office work

(Source: [Gallup](#))

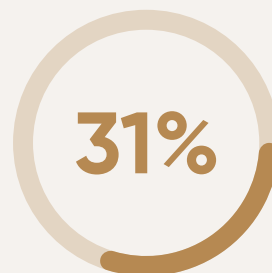
While [employees appreciate](#) the flexibility to work how and where they want, both hybrid and remote options are susceptible to pitfalls like virtual meeting fatigue, more siloed teams, and blurred lines between work and home. Awareness of the toll these challenges can take on employee mental health and well-being, and proactive steps to address them, can make a real difference.

Mental health and the work environment

In Lyra Health's 2022 [State of Workforce Mental Health report](#), 31 percent of employees surveyed reported a decline in their mental health over the past year. In the same survey, 59 percent of employees said their mental health impacted their work. While returning to the office, even part-time, may not help alleviate stress and anxiety, providing the work options that best suit employees [can help them stay engaged and reduce levels of burnout](#).

Still, employees who prefer a hybrid environment may have reservations about returning to the office amid continuous COVID variants, flu seasons, and other health concerns. There may also be [no clear consensus](#) about how

often and when they want to return—making it tough to enact a policy everyone is happy with.



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(Source: [2022 State of Workforce Mental Health report](#))

If your employees are fully remote, they may face additional challenges, including isolation, working longer hours, and distractions at home.

While there's no one solution for where and how to work that will fit every employee, one thing is clear: Addressing employees' mental health and well-being is vital. An important first step is adopting strategies that [foster a culture of good mental health](#), regardless of where your employees are working.

Creating a mentally healthy workplace, in and out of the office

Start with empathy

Whether your entire team remains remote, adopts a hybrid model, or is a mix of both, it's essential to approach discussions about their work environment in a positive light. By conveying compassion, you'll show your understanding of why they have certain preferences—even if you can't accommodate all of them. It's also important to acknowledge the types of personal and professional challenges people are facing and communicate the efforts you'll make to allow for flexibility.

Empathy can also help ease stress among your team members. While the pandemic may no longer be grabbing headlines, there's no shortage of stressful events every day, from social and political unrest and global conflicts to climate crises. Given all that's going on, people need to be reminded that their work is valued and serves a larger purpose. Reinforce this message by letting your teams know how much their work is appreciated.

Listen and learn

Even if you've had a hybrid or remote policy in place for a while, your employees will likely have questions related to their work environment. They may wonder whether the hybrid model will change over time, or how the hybrid-remote work combination will affect team dynamics. Whatever their top concerns may be, it's important to be aware of them.

Consider launching periodic pulse surveys to capture feedback and give people a chance to voice their feelings. After collecting feedback, remember to share a summary of the results. Be prepared to address any major themes that were reported. If employees voice concerns about aspects of a remote or hybrid policy but there's no indication their employer is willing to make any changes, it could upset them further.

A [workforce assessment](#) can also help identify population-wide workplace risk factors, particularly those that may not be as visible in a remote or hybrid workforce. These could include bullying, excessive workloads, and low job control. When large-scale risk factors are identified, it's easier to create a mental health strategy to address them.

Communicate early and often

Consistent communication is key, especially when your teams are remote, hybrid, or both. Being away from the office during important updates or announcements can make people feel left out or disconnected. For all communications across the company or even within a team, share across multiple channels (this may include emails, newsletters, workplace messaging apps, and all-hands meetings) to ensure messages are highly visible.

When communicating about hybrid and remote policies, be sure to:

- Provide the rationale behind business decisions regarding any changes in remote or hybrid status. Employees are more likely to accept policy decisions when they understand the underlying process and considerations behind them. It's a good idea to include any references and sources that helped inform your decisions.
- If you're going to adopt a hybrid model for employees who were previously remote, give a timeline for when they'll need to return to the office, guidelines for when and how often they'll need to be there, and policies and safety protocols for when they're on-site.

- Include remote employees in all communications, even if it's regarding on-site work. Treat them as a single team and communicate openly with them. This will help remote employees feel included in the team and avoid accidentally excluding them from any vital information.

Lead by example

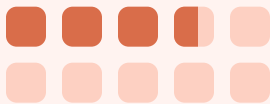
It can help employees feel more at ease to open up about their struggles, both in and out of the workplace, if you mention your own challenges. Whether hybrid or remote, there's still a balancing act taking place between work and home, and each group is facing unique challenges.

Sharing these challenges can also help you emphasize that mental wellness is important to everyone. [Focus on the efforts you've taken to ensure good self-care](#), including setting boundaries around work hours and taking regular breaks during the day. If you've found prioritizing self-care to be difficult, it's OK to acknowledge that. Just make sure to keep this conversation going and encourage your team members to care for themselves.

Check in regularly

Remote and hybrid teams will have fewer opportunities for the types of casual social interactions that happen daily in a physical workplace. This can lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection. And it can make it hard for managers to observe some of the more subtle signs that employees are struggling—such as body language or tone of voice. And according to [Lyra's survey](#), 36 percent of workers said [mental health was not discussed at all in their workplace](#).

36%



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(Source: [2022 State of Workforce
Mental Health report](#))

Regular check-ins can make employees more comfortable speaking up if they're facing challenges, in addition to giving managers an opportunity to respond to signs of concern. Even something as simple as an instant message to ask how they're doing and let them know how you can help can demonstrate care and concern.

You can approach check-ins from an individual and team level.

- **Individually:** Check in casually with team members throughout the week about how they're doing and how they're managing their work. This is an opportunity to show empathy if they're struggling, and share what support you can offer.
- **For team meetings:** Consider designating the first five to 10 minutes for a "wellness check" by asking team members to share how they're feeling and what they're doing to support themselves. This may mean starting with something like, "What's something you've tried this week for [self-care](#)?"

Be proactive about providing mental health support

With the partial return to shared workspaces, managers will be better positioned to spot signs of emotional distress in their hybrid employees. But for those who continue to work remotely full-time, it's even more crucial to create explicit opportunities to express areas of struggle, and to foster an environment that makes it OK to discuss emotional well-being.

Being proactive about mental health starts with strategies that foster a [mentally healthy workforce](#). This may come in the form of providing flexible deadlines or working hours, and communicating openly about health and safety concerns. Pulse surveys are a great way to learn what your employees would find most helpful.

Some employees may seek out additional support, such as resources to help with navigating stress or talking with a professional about mental health. A dedicated mental health benefit can make it easy to suggest additional support with accessible, comprehensive care.

Maintaining a mentally healthy team

As we navigate a continually changing world, it's important to remember that we're all doing our best to adapt to new ways of living and working together. The ongoing mental health implications of the pandemic and other current events can affect employees no matter where they work. But by recognizing the unique hurdles your people face and taking action to address them, you can provide the support they need to thrive as they adjust to our ever-evolving world of work.

For employees who need additional resources, promote your EAP to connect them to available mental health care services. If your company offers Lyra as a benefit, employees can [register for care](#) to find a provider who's right for their needs today.

Ready to reimagine your mental health benefit?

Get in touch with us.
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www.lyrahealth.com



About Lyra Health

[Lyra Health](#) helps leading companies improve access to effective, high-quality mental health care for their employees and their families. With Lyra's innovative digital care platform and global provider network, members receive the best care and get better faster.