

IP Inclusive/CIPA webinar 2 April 2020: The mental health impact of working from home

Panellist Mary Taylor, from the UK IPO, mentioned in the webinar that she and her colleagues had instigated “virtual tea breaks” to help maintain morale and team spirit among those who work from home. In response to audience questions that we were unable to address during the webinar itself, Mary has kindly provided more information about these schemes.

Mary writes:

We’ve got several “virtual tea breaks” going:

1. “Written tea points”: we’ve internal online pages set up as virtual tea point pages where people can post and comment on things, just like a social media platform. These have been created by small teams of colleagues but there’s also an office wide one to try to recreate some of that corridor interaction. It’s been really important that leaders show it’s fine to interact like this and post things themselves. Hence the IPO Board are currently playing “Through the Keyhole” on it.
2. Regular “virtual tea breaks”: these are done using video conferencing and most groups seem to be having one at a set time each day. They’re optional and the aim is that you don’t talk about work itself. A top tip is that the leader of the team needs to attend occasionally to show that it’s fine to be in a virtual tea point but shouldn’t turn up to every tea point as people like to talk without their boss present! Depending on the number in the team and the video conferencing system used we’re finding that some small tea breaks are also needed for sub-groups, perhaps less frequently.
3. “Ad hoc virtual tea breaks”: in some video conferencing systems it’s possible to set up an all-day appointment which people can pop into and out of as they want. So if someone feels like a break or a chat they just pop in and other people who are around join in. This is proving popular with people who are living alone and perhaps need more social interaction.
4. “Virtual lunch/coffee”: we’ve been encouraging staff to use the video conferencing system for the normal coffees/lunches they might go on with people around the office. My top tip is to ensure you agree on the standard of lunch. I’m still miffed that my regular lunch with a colleague last week turned into me watching someone eat pizza whilst I had our more usual salad!

16 April 2020