



Mental health and COVID-19 for public servants: Caregiving while working

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Aussi offert en français sous le titre : Santé mentale et COVID-19 pour les fonctionnaires : Prodiguer des soins tout en travaillant

Mental health and COVID-19 for public servants: Caregiving while working

[Protect your mental health](#)

[Get help](#)

[Learn from trusted sources](#)

[Balance family life](#)

[Supporting employees and teams](#)

[Caregiving while working](#)

[Manage psychosocial risks](#)

[Information for employees: COVID-19](#)

! If you are in distress, please contact your [Employee Assistance Program](#) or nearest [crisis / distress centre](#). If it is an emergency, call 9-1-1 or go to your local emergency department.

On this page:

- [Balancing work and care](#)
- [Coping while caregiving](#)
- [Supporting caregivers at work](#)
- [Additional resources](#)

Balancing work and care

With physical distancing measures in place during COVID-19, many employees working from home have also taken on new or additional caregiving responsibilities. Be it looking after elderly family members and/or loved ones with disabilities or illness, caregiving while physical distancing means less access to external services and more responsibilities for the caregiver. Balancing remote working and caring for another person is by no means easy. If that's your case, here are some ideas to help you get through.

Establish a care routine

Maintaining a daily routine is important for the well-being of both the caregiver and the person needing care. It is especially critical when trying to balance caregiving responsibilities while trying to work from home. Some helpful tips:

- communicate with the loved one you're caring for so they understand that these are unusual times
- try to create a calm and predictable daily routine for them
 - those who receive private home care may already have one
- build your workday around the care routine
- take advantage of technology for entertainment
 - use mobile devices to provide them with games or audiobooks
 - connect them with other family members
 - [How Technology Can Support Caregivers During COVID-19](#) offers more helpful tips on how to make technology work for you.

Set boundaries

Minimize disruptions to your "work time" by clearly articulating your boundaries:

- establish visual cues so that they know when you don't want to be disturbed
 - discuss these cues with them, e.g. closing the door to your workspace, or wearing headphones
- reassure them that you'll be present when they need you
 - discuss what to do if a matter is urgent
 - talk about what kinds of situations are urgent and what kinds are not

Plan ahead

Creating a [caregiver contingency plan](#) in the event of an emergency can help reduce stress and anxiety during uncertain times:

- have an idea ahead of time of what to do if the person needs urgent professional care

- note that this procedure could change due to COVID-19 health guidelines
- establish who to call, where to go
- plan for longer wait times
- discuss the plan with the person so they have an idea of what to expect
- plan what coping strategies you will use for yourself
- determine who can step in to help should you ever be unable to give care
 - this includes steps to follow if you believe you have COVID-19

For more information, see [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): How to care for a person with COVID-19 at home - Advice for caregivers.](#)

Tell your team

- don't assume that your colleagues know what is going on
- let your manager and co-workers know your situation and ask for compassion and support as needed
 - this will help them understand if you can't take a call or need to step away from a meeting
- work with your team to plan meetings at times that are convenient for everyone
- being open about your experience will empower others to do the same

For more information, the Canada Human Rights Commission offers [A Guide to Balancing Work and Caregiving Obligations.](#)

Coping while caregiving

Being a caregiver on any given day isn't easy. In times of crisis, it can become overwhelming for even the best of us. Caregiver burnout is real. To minimize your risk of burnout, taking care of yourself must be just as

important as taking care of a loved one. Here are some ideas to help.

Make self-care a priority

Protecting your mental health by practising self-care will help ensure you are able to provide the best care possible to your loved one:

- take regular short breaks
- eat regularly
- get enough sleep
- exercise when possible
- make time for a hobby
- connect socially while keeping your distance

The Public Health Agency of Canada offers more ideas on self-care for caregivers.

Remember: you're allowed to feel frustrated, stressed and overwhelmed. Recognizing your limits and setting boundaries are not signs of weakness. Your ability to cope depends on your ability to manage your stressors.

Ask for help

It is always ok to ask for help. Having a support network in place can help lighten your load as a caregiver:

- establish your support team
 - create a list or schedule of all the things that need to get done
 - identify who can help you, while respecting physical distancing guidelines
- ask family members or friends to lend you hand by running errands or placing delivery/curbside pick-up orders, e.g. groceries, prescriptions.

If you are struggling to cope, there are resources, supports and services available to get help with managing your mental health and emotional well-being.

Supporting caregivers at work

Caregiving on a regular basis can be overwhelming at the best of times, with challenges magnified when trying to work from home during COVID-19. If you have a co-worker who is caring for an elderly loved one or someone with a disability or illness, here are some ways you can support them:

- check in with your colleague, and ask them how they're doing
- seek their permission to check-in on a regular basis, in a manner and on a schedule convenient for them, e.g. by email or text, phone call or audio/video chat on an appointed day and time
- offer your support in managing their workload, e.g. helping them with a specific task, or sharing notes from a missed meeting

If you're a manager

To best support an employee juggling caregiving responsibilities with work duties:

- ask your employee how you can best support them during this time
- set up a regular check-in schedule around their caregiving routine
- be flexible about meeting times and assignment deadlines, where possible
- encourage them to take care of their mental health, and share with them resources, supports and services available for public servants.

Supporting employees and teams offers additional ways you can lead your people through COVID-19 and beyond.

Additional resources

Mental Health Commission of Canada

- [Caregiving: Resources](#)
- [Caregiving in the era of COVID-19: What to expect and how to cope](#)

Canadian Mental Health Association

- [Supporting a Loved One](#)

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

- [Partners in Care: Supporting Families in Patient Recovery](#)

The Ontario Caregiver Association

- [Family Caregivers and COVID-19 Precautions Caregivers Need to Take Now](#)
- [COVID-19: Caregiver Tips and Resources](#)
- [Helpline](#)

Alzheimer Society Canada

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Tips for people with dementia, caregivers and families](#)

Canadian Association for Community Living

- [#COVIDdisability: Disability-Related Resources for Families](#)

Canadian Virtual Hospice

- [COVID-19 Resources](#)

Ontario Ministry of Health

- Self-isolation: Guide for caregivers, household members and close contacts

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