

Essential guide to

Working remotely

If you are a manager please also refer to the 'Essential Guide to Managing Remotely'. Both guides should be read in conjunction with the Remote Working Policy.

Remote working has many benefits for both the individual and the organisation. This guide has been designed to assist you in understanding the basic requirements and tools available, as well as to emphasise the importance of looking after your wellbeing.

Although physically distanced it is important to remain socially connected.

Communications protocols

Daily basis

Recording of hours

Fill in My Portal with your time recording each day, clocking out for breaks in the normal way. You should not work overtime or excessive amounts to build up flexi time without the prior approval of your manager.

Breaks

Working remotely can really help our productivity but, because we can focus more easily, we may end up having fewer breaks.

Make sure you **review the wellbeing section** of this guide and ensure you give your eyes a rest from your screens.

Also make sure you use your annual leave entitlement to give you a change of routine and scenery.

Regular basis

Availability updates

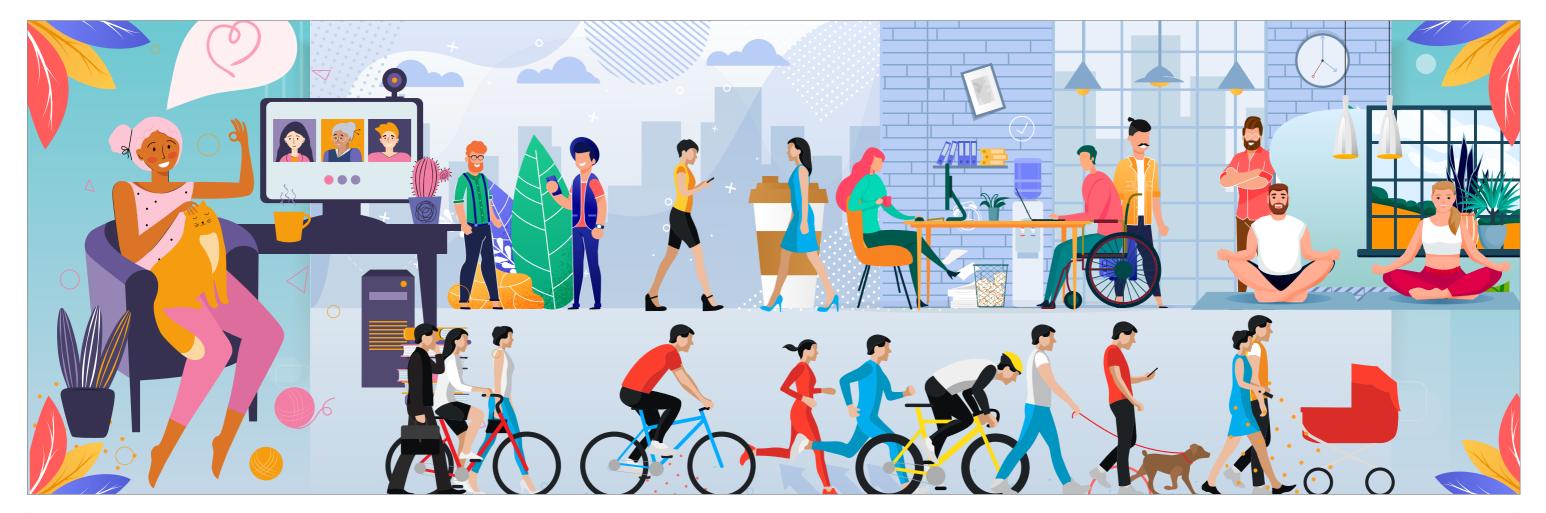
It is important to highlight your working pattern in your calendar so colleagues know when you are available. Make sure your calendar is readable to the whole organisation – you can make specific items private if necessary.

Use your out of office when you are not working to advise when you will be back and who to contact for urgent items.

Social interaction with colleagues

We all need to be reminded that we work and interact with real human beings, not just virtual ones. Wherever possible turn on your cameras so you can 'see' your colleagues; not only does it help us feel more connected to them but being able to see their facial expression and body language helps to prevent misunderstandings.

Even though you may be on a work call it's ok to talk to each other as you would over a cuppa in the office – ask your colleagues how their week is going, how their family is or what they are doing at the weekend. Even better, if you are able to, why not schedule lunchtime walks with each other.



Data/IT security

Regularly check that you are up to date with our remote working and portable device guidance in relation to data protection.

- Keep mobile devices and laptops safe from theft
- Do not leave devices unlocked if left unattended in the house
- Make passwords secure
- Ensure you cannot be overheard whilst on a call or in a meeting
- Make sure you are the only one who can see your screen
- Avoid saving items to the desktop as these are not remotely backed up
- Store physical data securely out of sight
- Do not destroy physical confidential data at home keep this secure until you are able to dispose of it properly at the office
- Be vigilant of phishing attacks and keep up to date with your cyber security training

Weekly basis

Catch-up

We recommend that you have a video catch up with your direct line manager once a week.

Monthly basis

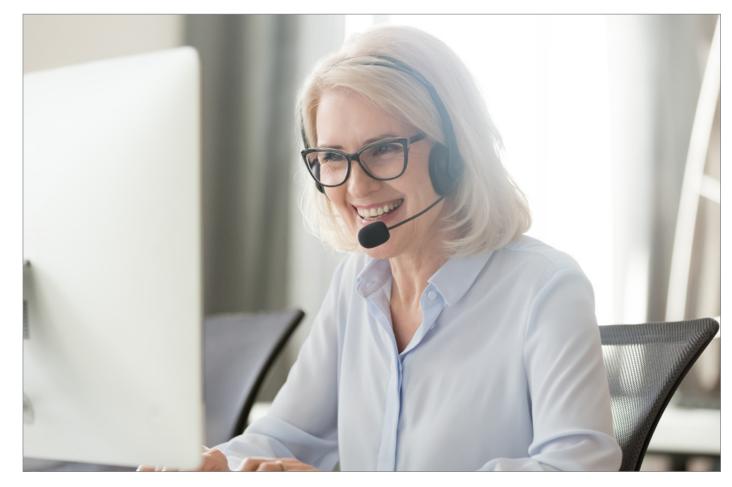
One to ones

It is important to have a monthly discussion with your manager dedicated to reviewing your progress against objectives and training.

This meeting should ideally be a video chat on Microsoft Teams accompanied by a one to one form within Ashford Achieve to keep a record of the discussion. Speak to our Learning and Development Officer for assistance with this.

It is also a good opportunity for another check in with how you are feeling and what support you need.





Appraisals

When you review your objectives and training needs regularly as part of your monthly one to ones then your annual appraisal and mid-year reviews are a breeze.

Make time for these – the more thought you put into how you feel the past year has gone and what you'd like to concentrate on/learn during the next year the more productive these will be!

General tips

Health and Safety

Continually review your workstation to check you are following health and safety advice and keeping yourself safe.

Report any accidents, injuries, diseases or dangerous occurrences arising from and/or relating to the performance of your work that occur whilst working at home to your manager and complete the normal reporting procedures.

Staff updates

Make sure you keep up to date with all the latest internal staff communications via the ABC newsfeed blog on the Smarthub. You can 'follow' this and receive email notifications when something new is uploaded. Alternatively you can use the Connect+ app as explained later in this guide.

Recognition

It is just as important to say thank you to your colleagues whilst working remotely, or to recognise when someone displays one of our values (Ambitious, Creative and Trustworthy).

As you will not be passing their desk to do this, think about making use of our e-cards on the Smarthub so everyone can celebrate the excellent work that goes on daily throughout the organisation.

Sickness

You should report in sick in accordance with normal reporting procedures.

Face to face contact

At least one face to face team meeting will take place every eight weeks and these will be attended by all employees including those who have remote working arrangements.

There may be other instances where you are required to attend the office during your normal remote working hours for a specific meeting or training.

How to use tools – tips and etiquettes

Below we have listed some of the most frequent tools and systems we use and how to access them. Please speak to your manager if you need to know how to use one of your services' systems if it is not listed.

It is really important to keep your technical skills up to date when working remotely and this can be difficult when no-one is sitting near you to lend a hand. If there is something you are stuck with or feel like there must be an easier way to do something, make a quick call to your manager or colleague and find out how. Don't be shy! Think of all the time you could save.

Skype

Making a call

Skype will automatically load when you switch on your pc. Click the icon on the task bar to bring the app up. Here you will see members of your team and any other contacts you have added.

To make a call, double click their name. A box will appear and at the bottom you have the option of sending an instant message, making a video call, an audio call or sharing your screen. To make a standard audio call click the telephone icon and select 'Skype call'.



Send an instant message

Click the speech bubble and a text box with cursor will appear. Type your message and press enter.

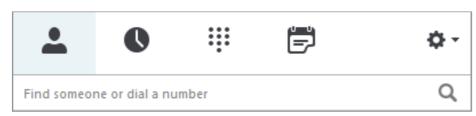


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Make an external call

To make an external call you can either type the number into the search bar or select the keypad and type in the number there. Press enter.



Microsoft Teams

MS Teams will also load automatically on start up. **You can** access training on the different functionality here.

MS Teams etiquette

If you are engaged in a meeting or telephone conversation on Teams it is good practice to switch your video camera on so you can see and talk to your caller clearly.

Also please ensure that your setting is suitable and you can't see a lot of clutter or items that you would not want others viewing behind you. If you can't have a clear background you can always use one of the pre-loaded ones or blur your background by clicking the silhouette on the toolbar.

If your environment is at all noisy please remain on mute until you wish to speak. Also follow the normal courtesies of allowing others to speak and not talking over them.





Accessing systems

Pulse

Follow the instructions issued by IT for initially getting set up to use Pulse, then simply select the Pulse icon in the system tray when you log on.

Double clicking this icon will bring the connect box up.

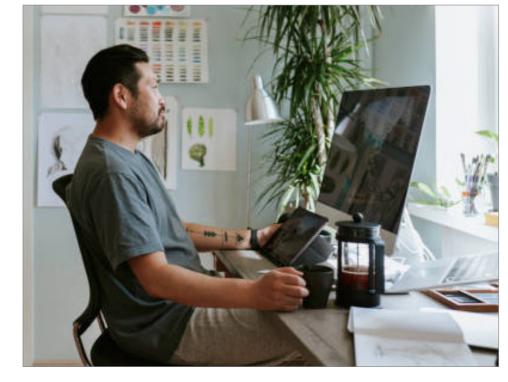
Click connect then you should see your username. In secondary password type **push**.





You will now see that you are connected and can use your laptop to access our different systems.





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Drive access

On the task bar at the bottom of the screen you will see the file explorer icon.



Clicking on this will show your frequently used folders, recent files and on the left hand pane you will see the drives you have access to. Where the drive has a green connector, clicking it will bring up the folders within that drive. If there is a red cross as shown below, clicking it should make the red cross disappear so you can access the files. If not, log a call with IT.



Efin

To access efin, double click the icon on your desktop. From here you will need to enter your username and password. This is your standard system logon.

Ashford Achieve

To access Ashford Achieve for your learning and development either hover over the self-service tab on the top of the intranet homepage or access Ashford Achieve learning and development here to go straight into the system.

This will take you to your logon screen. Your username is your firstname.surname (all lower case).

If you can't remember your password select 'Forgotten your username or password' and enter your username or your email address (not both). You will receive an email if your account has a current email address that will allow you to reset.

ITrent

To access iTrent hover over the self-service tab on the top of the intranet home screen. You can select either iTrent (self-service) if you wish to book holiday or change your personal details or if you are a manager and you are looking for the team information select iTrent People Manager.

My Ashford Rewards

Accessing the site - Apps

There are two free apps to download.

1. Connect+

The first is the **Connect+ app** which you can download free from Apple Store and Google Play (search Connect+). It will verify who you are by sending a code to the email address you use for My Ashford Rewards.

This app provides mobile, on-the-go access to important employee communications as well as the ability to easily send and receive e-cards, and look at the social recognition wall.

The app will give you a notification when a new blog is posted (a discreet app icon) and you can scroll through all the news at your leisure (with the added bonus of easy access to ecards).

2. Smartspending™

The second is the **SmartSpending™** app which you can download free from Apple Store and Google Play (search SmartSpending). It will verify who you are by sending a code to the email address you use for My Ashford Rewards and then you can set up a four digit pin number.

This app is for the shopping discounts. With it you can purchase Instant Vouchers at a discount and use them in-store and online, earn Cashback when shopping, order new and top up existing reloadable cards and view your account details – all from your mobile device.

You'll even receive alerts when top retailers increase their discount!

These two apps don't show you the homepage for My Ashford Rewards which contains other information about locally negotiated employee benefits, wellbeing, the Onion Club and more so make sure you also review the website periodically to make the most of everything.





Accessing the site - Website

Visit www.myashfordrewards.co.uk from any computer or mobile device – it's accessible to you 24/7 and on the go.

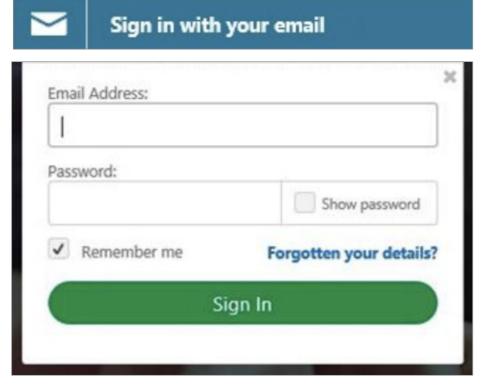
You then have a choice of how to login going forward when you come to the home screen:

1. Click on 'login with windows login' and use your work email address and computer password that you use to login to your pc. Click on 'remember me' and you won't need to login every time you want to access the site on that device.



OR

2. Use your email address that you use for the site (initially this was set up as your work email address but you may have changed this since) and password that you set up. Click on 'remember me' and you won't need to login every time you want to access the site on that device.



Can't remember your password? No problem! Click on **forgotten your details** and it will ask you for the email address you use for the site and send a verification code to it.

Wellbeing

Your wellbeing is important to us. Everyday life and balancing the requirements of work and home can create pressures for all of us.

When remote working it is critical to take care of yourself and ask for help when you need it as your manager and colleagues cannot spot the signs of needing support as easily as when working together in the office.

Stick to a routine

Try to stick to the same time to wake up and go to bed every day. Waking up at a set time helps stabilise your internal clock and improves your sleep. You'll feel less tired, more refreshed and find it easier to concentrate throughout the day.

Get showered and dressed and instead of going straight from your bed to your desk try to fill the time you'd normally commute with a little exercise or a longer breakfast.

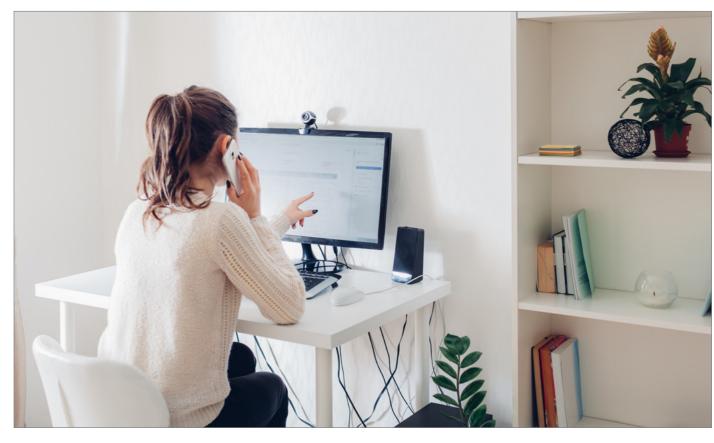
Routine keeps our mind occupied and helps us feel in control, which helps to reduce stress and anxiety.

Look at your work environment

Set up a comfortable workspace, ideally away from your sleeping area, with enough light and space – preferably away from others in your household and away from through areas. Remove clutter and other things like mobile phones that could be distracting.

Always take the advice from Health and Safety on how to set up your workstation, as you would in the office.







Try 3G VIP

3g

Write down (this is more effective than thinking) three things that you are grateful for and try to vary this daily. This could be things like – my daily walk in the fresh air with my dog, the sun shining, crunching in autumn leaves, a smile from a stranger or a conversation with a loved one.

You cannot have two emotions at once so by filling your mind with positive things it gives you an immediate mental boost and sense of wellbeing.

VIP

Write down your:

Vision – what do you want to achieve this week/this year/in your life? This can help you clarify your thoughts and work out what is important to you.

Intention – what is your intention for the day? Identify one main thing you want to achieve and try to tackle this early on when you are fresher. This will give you a sense of purpose and accomplishment.

Progress – look back at previous days/weeks to see how far you've come and think about what you've achieved for extra motivation.

Hydrate

Did you know that just a 5% drop in hydration can reduce your productivity by 35% – not to mention affect your immunity! Make it a habit to have a long glass of water as one of the first things you do in the morning. Ideally this should be slightly warm water that has been boiled, but if you don't fancy that then just try to avoid ice cold water for your first glass of the day.

Keep in touch

Maintain regular contact with your manager and colleagues. Use Microsoft Teams for group video meetings which can provide an opportunity to share concerns and offer help and support to each other. Keep communications positive and have some time to talk about things other than work. This can help you feel more connected to those faces you'd usually see on a daily basis.

Create natural energy

Stand up to make your calls or walk around the room when considering a problem.

Take regular breaks

Rest and recovery is extremely important for optimal wellbeing. Regular breaks are also essential for productivity and creativity. If you were in the office you would do a tea round or chat with a colleague so make a cuppa, give your pet a cuddle, put a load of washing on and get some exercise at lunchtime – just ensure you log out for your lunchbreak and keep an eye on your hours.

Where possible, schedule a walk each day. Movement and exposure to nature will boost your mental health.

Upgrade your lunchtime

If you're working from home you may have more variety in your cupboards than the bog standard sandwiches. Take the opportunity to step away from your computer to make something from scratch or maybe read a book or sit in your garden.

Plan your meals. This encourages eating for wellbeing and contributes to a sense of achievement.

Mark the end of your day

Just like you did in the morning, develop a ritual for the end of the day to signify that you have finished work. If you can, put your laptop away, tidy your desk and get changed. Anything that naturally signals the end of the workday will establish some boundaries.

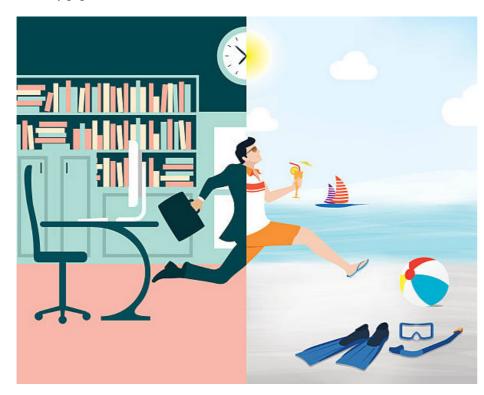








Occupy your commute time



Many of us use our commute as 'me time' so allocate that time to something you enjoy. It's easy to fill that extra time with work, family demands or household chores so if it's possible try to do something solely for you.

It could be reading, walking, painting, gardening, board games, jigsaws, colouring in, sewing, juggling, meditation, exercising, listening to podcasts, watching documentaries, calling a friend or anything else that calms you.

You could do a short online course to learn a new skill. You could discover a new hobby, plan a new trip or reminisce and get the photos out of a past holiday.

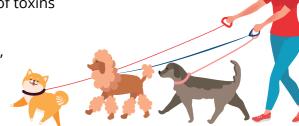
Or you could take advantage of volunteering opportunities to help others, which also nurtures our own sense of purpose and self-worth.

Enhance your physical health

Here we are talking about movement for optimal well-being which is separate to exercise. Always talk to your GP if you have any health conditions.

It is essential to keep our bodies moving. Movement helps pump oxygen to our brains, helps our lymphatic system get rid of toxins and releases pressure on our immune system.

Sitting for long periods is thought to slow the metabolism, which affects the body's ability to regulate blood sugar, blood pressure and break down body fat.



So remember 45 - 10 - 2! *

45 minutes

You should stand up and move around at least every forty-five minutes – even just a short walk to get a glass of water or walk up and down the stairs.

10 minutes

You would benefit from a gentle walk for ten minutes outside in the fresh air each day.

2 minutes

You should try to have two minutes of vigorous activity every day. This could be something as simple as doing jumping jacks or running on the spot whilst boiling the kettle.







Fresh air for 10 mins



Cardio for 2mins





















^{*} Source - The Wellbeing People



Get some downtime and sleep

Simple lifestyle changes can make a world of difference to your quality of sleep.

Keep regular hours

Going to bed and getting up at roughly the same time, all the time, will programme your body to sleep better.

Create a restful sleeping environment

Your bedroom should be kept for rest and sleep and it should be neither too hot, nor too cold; and as quiet and dark as possible.

Make sure your bed is comfortable

It's difficult to get deep, restful sleep on one that's too soft, too hard, too small or too old. If you're not sure if you need a new bed, the National Bed Federation's website has lots of advice.

Take more exercise

Regular, moderate exercise such as swimming or walking can help relieve the day's stresses and strains. But not too close to bedtime or it may keep you awake!

Cut down on stimulants such as caffeine in tea or coffee

They interfere with falling asleep and prevent deep sleep. Have a hot milky drink or herbal tea instead, especially in the evening.

Try to relax before going to bed

Have a warm bath, listen to some quiet music, do some yoga - all help to relax both the mind and body. Your doctor may be able to recommend a helpful relaxation tape too. Stay off your phone or other devices just before bed.

Deal with worries

Make a list of things to be tackled the next day. If you can't sleep, don't lie there worrying about it. Get up and do something you find relaxing until you feel sleepy again – then go back to bed.

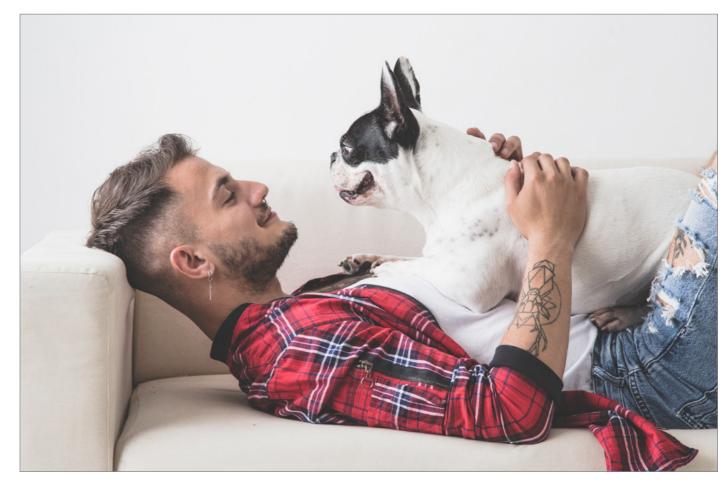
Don't over-indulge

Too much food or alcohol, especially late at night just before bedtime, can play havoc with sleep patterns. Alcohol may help you fall asleep initially, but will interrupt your sleep later on in the night.

Don't smoke

Yes, it's bad for sleep too: smokers take longer to fall asleep, wake more often and often experience more sleep disruption.







Mental health

Remote working has numerous benefits, and some people feel it boosts their mental health and they have less social anxiety. Over a long period of time however is important to look out for signs that extensive remote working is affecting you adversely. This may never be the case for you, but if it is, speak to your manager immediately.

Try to stay in the present rather than thinking about the past or worrying about the future excessively.

Isolation

If you start to feel lonely then this could increase your risk of depression, stress and anxiety. It is important therefore that you prioritise connection and your emotional health by reaching out to your co-workers and managers.

Online meeting fatigue

When remote working, online meetings will be essential to keep a team feeling connected, to get projects moving and sometimes for training.

However sometimes ask yourself – do we need to have this meeting or will an email suffice? If it is going to be a long meeting could we schedule a break? Using video can require greater focus than a face-to-face conversation. We miss nonverbal cues and unnatural silences can cause anxiety for some people.

On the other hand a quick video call can cut out extensive email conversations and save time not to mention inboxes. It's all about balance!

Burnout

We can be very stressed and still see a way out, whereas burnout often leaves us feeling empty and beyond caring. Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress.

It may be recognisable by exhaustion, lowered immunity, frequent headaches, feeling detached, loss of motivation, withdrawal, adopting a negative outlook or using harmful coping strategies.

Whilst this can also occur when working in an office, it may be more difficult for your manager or co-workers to spot these signs when remote working. It is therefore important that you keep up communication with your manager and ask for support.

Identify your stressors

These could be internal, for example – low self-esteem, being dehydrated, excessive caffeine or alcohol. These could be external, for example – the weather or behaviour of a loved one.

Are any of these within your control to change? Focus on the ones that are, and decide what positive action you can take about those that are not.

Allocate time to worry

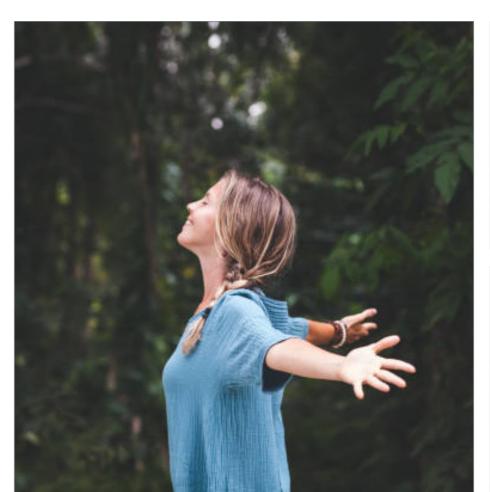
Sometimes things are a bit too overwhelming to cope with and it would be impossible not to worry or feel low about them. A great tip is to allocate 10 minutes of your day for these feelings. That way, when you find yourself thinking about them your brain can push them out of your mind until that time. During the allocated time you could write down how you feel and why. When the time is up, resolve not to think about it again until your next allocated time. Take control of it – don't let it take control of you.

Breathe

When we get anxious, this can affect our breathing. It may feel as though you are breathing higher up in your chest, more shallowly or restricted.

Working on the simple breathing technique below may help to calm your body and mind (just five minutes will do).

- **1.** Stop what you are doing and find a quiet place, away from your laptop and mobile if you can (you can even lie down in fact this is also a great technique to do before you go to sleep).
- **2.** Place one hand on your chest and one on your tummy and turn your attention to your natural breath. You are not trying to change it, just become aware of it. Notice if there is more movement in your chest or tummy.







- **3.** Now move both hands to your tummy and allow your breath to just come and go naturally.
- **4.** Keep your attention focused on any movement that you might feel underneath your hands. It may be minimal, that's fine. You may also find your mind wandering but just keep bringing it back to your breath and the movement of your tummy. After a while your breathing may naturally deepen with this continued focus.

Speak to someone

If you need mental or emotional support speak to your line manager, your colleagues or access the Health Assured, our employee assistance programme website here.

Username: ashford

Password: council

Free 24-hour Confidential Helpline on 0800 030 5182.

e-Hub App

Download the e-Hub app on your mobile device. The Health e-Hub app provides total support in the palm of your hand. It's free to download and available on both IOS and Android.

If you have a question about anything in this guide please speak to your line manager or email human.resources@ashford.gov.uk

now it's me time...

