



Intentional Telecommuting

Creating a compassionate and sustainable practice in working from home

This guide explores different strategies to ease the transition to working from home and to cope with the inherent stress of adjusting to change. First, a brief overview of what it looks like to experience stress as a human.

How stress impacts us

Anytime we experience stress, crisis, or uncertainty, our body's sympathetic nervous system kicks in to protect the body from anticipated harm. Since evolution and adaptation is a process that moves rather slowly, the body's tools to protect us are a little antiquated: The tools that aided our ancestors in running away from or fending off predators aren't so useful for us in the modern age. For example, a sympathetic nervous response includes a major hormone response of increased heart rate and alertness, the gut often stops digesting food or slows down significantly, and we often have limited access to the part of our brain where logical, rational thinking and values-aligned decision making occurs. This shift in the body's function aided our ancestors in surviving an often physically dangerous landscape but does not provide much meaningful support in the face of today's stressors.

It is important to keep in mind that we are all experiencing a multitude of interrelated stressors. While many of these stressors may be outside our control, there are other aspects of our lives in which we retain our voice, choice, and power: How we structure our days, what we do (or don't do) throughout the day, the habits we cultivate — each of these offers an opportunity to make wise choices and set ourselves up for success. The following guide offers ideas and suggestions to help you find what works best for you when working from home.

7 Ideas for Intentional, Sustainable Telecommuting

1. Contain your workday: Set limits for each workday based on your access to energy.

- Our minds and bodies crave certainty in times like this, when so much is out of our control. Give yourself the grace of limits on when work begins and ends each day. A reliable routine can help your body, mind, and spirit sit in the certainty of a set schedule.
- If you are able to flex your work hours, explore times you're most energized, focused, or would benefit from work distraction.
- Set firm boundaries that honor a sustainable work/life balance and allow separation from work once "off duty."

- At the end of your work day, log off of applications or devices, put work materials away, and mute email and other work-related notifications.
- Consider a transition ritual such as changing out of your “work” clothes and into something else, sending colleagues a sign-off, announcing to your household that you are “home from work,” or even silently saying to yourself, “and now I am done.”

2. Take breaks and set limits — and stick to it!

- Make space for meals, movement, mindfulness, and rest as needed.
 - Pick a set lunch time, then add some movement or mindfulness to provide a quick reset midday.
 - Try integrating movement into your day. This can be a short walk around the block or a quick yoga practice at your desk, like this [10-minute seated yoga practice](#).
- Set limits for your screen time .
 - Our collective screentime will increase due to shifts toward telecommuting and videoconferencing. However, you still have a say in how much your screen time increases overall.
 - Explore decreasing screen time outside of work. This could be reading books, trying out a new hobby like knitting, playing board games with family members, or trying a new recipe for dinner.

3. Get curious about your relationship to your work.

- Society invites us to link our sense of self-worth and identity to our profession.
 - Due to the effects of the collective stress we are experiencing, we may not have access to the same levels of productivity that we, our coworkers, and management have come to expect from us in the past. This is not only okay, but to be expected!
 - Often these links between labor and self-worth or identity are deeply rooted in our core beliefs and don't come to the surface often. It's normal for this to feel unexpected and to experience emotional distress when experiencing the impact or exploring these themes.
 - Explore facets of your life and identity that do not include work.
 - This means making space for leisure, fun, and creative pursuits.

4. Take time to check-in.

- We all need space to process our thoughts, emotions, and experience during this time, and these check-ins can be helpful in cultivating connection and compassionate expectations.

- Make time to share where you're at with those in your life (in a way that feels safe and comfortable for you), including loved ones, friends, co-workers, and supervisors.
- In sharing this, you can connect with others, receive support as needed, inform others' expectations of you, and model intentional self-care for your community.
- Think of your access to energy and motivation like a giant cup we carry in our bodies each day — sometimes it may be overflowing with nervous or fearful energy, while other times it may feel empty.
 - This provides important information for effective self-care. For example, an overflowing cup may need movement to cultivate ease and calm through energetic release, while a nearly empty cup may call for rest, restorative mindfulness like meditation, or a call to social supports who can pour care and compassion into your cup.
 - This can also provide a compassionate context for levels of productivity. On high energy days, it may feel energizing and empowering to dive into work; on low energy days, we may need to take extra breaks.

5. Commune with Nature

- Spending time outdoors aids in stress reduction and allows us to connect on a deeper level with our world and the elements of nature that are bigger than ourselves.
- According to *Frontiers in Psychology*, as little as 10 minutes of time spent sitting or walking in an outdoor environment can positively impact both physical and psychological well-being. This suggests these benefits are dose-responsive, meaning the more time we spend in nature, the more benefit we will receive.
- You can anchor breaks with self-care practices involving nature, like a morning walk, afternoons in the yard, gardening in the evening, or walking with pets for a quick reset.
- We benefit in a number of ways from “[earthing](#)” or connecting with the earth via the bare soles of our feet.

6. Create a calming workspace

- A soothing workspace can provide another context for self-care. Even though no one can “see” it, make a point to create a workspace that works for you.
- Honor your style and temperament in creating your space.
 - For those of us who are calmed by clutter-free space, organizing your desk at the beginning or end of your day can be a ritual that anchors you in gathering energy to begin your day or releasing and cleansing your workspace while unplugging. Bring compassion to this practice: If organizing or cleaning can be a stressor for you, find what feels both comfortable and manageable.
 - If you can, try to limit distractions. For example, setting aside a private space for your in-home workspace can be helpful.

- If you can, choose a spot near natural light. There's nothing quite like fresh spring air, especially when we're spending more time indoors. Find the right balance for you in inviting the outdoors into your workspace.
- Explore use of nature sounds, soothing music (with or without lyrics), or sound healing as a possible soundtrack to your day.

7. Make Space for Mindfulness

- Jon Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as “the awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally.”
- Mindfulness can also be thought of as a practice in noticing how we feel in the moment without judgement, and making space for choice in our response to any emotions or thoughts that have come up for us.
 - Try setting an alarm a few times throughout the day to signal a mindful pause. This could be as simple as three deep breaths or a [short guided meditation](#).
 - Or bookend your routine with a mindfulness moment to begin and end each day.
 - Apps like Headspace, Calm, Buddhify, and Insight Timer can be great resources for guided meditations on a number of topics or sound healing.
- For those who struggle with meditation, try mindful movement:
 - OIC now has [online yoga classes](#) via Zoom.
 - Try a mindful [walking meditation](#).