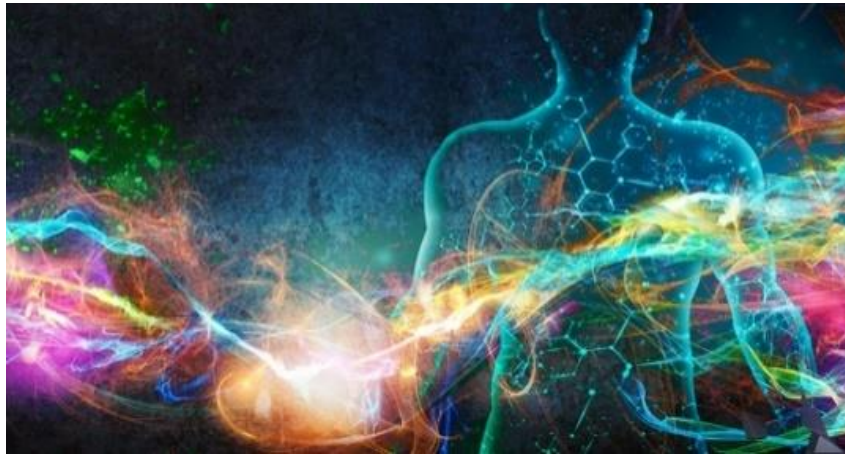


# **A COPE Framework**

## **‘Collaborate, Organise, Prepare and Enable ourselves to stay well’**

*Guidance and resources to support staff wellbeing and reduce unnecessary pressure from workload*



## INTRODUCTION

### A 'COPE Framework'

Welcome to this resource pack for staff and managers who are collectively trying to find ways to adjust and cope with our new and challenging environment following the Coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak. We all need to find new ways to cope and this means we need to put in place new arrangements that recognise the complexities in our lives and the different pressures we are having to juggle and deal with. Everyone needs to have a "COPE" discussion – drawing on the resources and ideas in this pack, to put in place new working principles that work for them. The expectation is that managers will initiate these discussions – but if they don't (and recognising that people are working under exceptional pressures) then have a look at these ideas and email your manager with some proposals about how your working experience could be improved.

We're calling on everyone to agree a 'COPE Framework' and review it regularly. If you have additional practical ideas about what would help you to cope please e-mail [framework@kent.ac.uk](mailto:framework@kent.ac.uk), as we will be regularly updating and reviewing this guide in light of what you tell us has worked for you.

In this resource pack, you will find a range of practical guidance and options to enable you and your manager to put together a COPE Framework that works for you. The Framework should take into account the pressures and complexities of the way we are working now. The resources have been designed to help you:

- Identify the best ways for you to **Collaborate** with your colleagues and others across the University, when we are all balancing many priorities and by necessity working well outside our normal patterns
- Recognise that you have the support of the University to **Organise** your working day, in as much as is possible, so that it works for you. If you are a line manager, you are empowered to support those in your team to reduce any necessary workload pressure and re-prioritise essential tasks, in whatever way works best in your local context
- Access guides and other resources which will help you **Prepare** for the ongoing uncertainty of the Coronavirus situation, and take the necessary action to prevent difficulties further down the line
- Feel that at least some of the unnecessary pressure on you has been reduced, so that you can restore your emotional resources and **Enable** yourself to stay well over the time to come

It's important to recognise that even those of us who are already used to remote working may be struggling to adapt in these challenging circumstances. You will not find the answers to all of your queries in this resource pack, or solutions that take away all of the pressures. However we hope that our guidance on remote working, communication, the role of line managers and pointing you towards some additional resources (including our Employee Assistance Programme) eases some of the pressure you are under, and enables you to put together a personalised COPE Framework, with the support of your manager. The message to all of us is: Do what you can, when you can, as best you can.

This resource pack has been designed to complement all of the support already available across the University as we prepare for a gradual return to campus, from departments such as Occupational Health, IS and Kent Sport, and with contributions from the Directors of Division, colleagues within HR and our Staff and Trades Union Representatives.

This latest version of the Framework includes a NEW section on Remote Meeting Management & Practice (see page 10).

## WORKING IN COLLABORATION: Empowering our line managers and staff to work together and support each other

Our absolute priority at this time is to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of the University's staff, students and visitors.

In the [Staff Guide](#) you will find many useful resources to guide you during these challenging times. In March, we featured guidance on home working, health and wellbeing, and online security.

Make sure you check in regularly for updates on our [Coronavirus guidance](#) web pages.

Our HR and IS teams have put together a handy guide to [working from home](#). On this web page you will also find a link to the University's new Pay Policy related to Covid-19.

Alongside the above support is the University's ongoing commitment to creating and supporting a diverse and inclusive community of staff and students. On the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity](#) web pages you will find a range of information and guidance for staff which you may find helpful when speaking with your manager about your working arrangements.

We encourage all staff to speak with their line managers about what will work for them, and incorporate this into their COPE Framework. Line managers are empowered to translate University policies and procedures into their local context. Line managers and staff have the University's support to find whatever solutions work for them at this time. No one should feel unsupported, alone or isolated.

Here are some points to consider:

- If you line manage others, think about what you can reasonably do to minimise stress and workload for your team. Engage in discussion with them. Don't be afraid to venture into territory you wouldn't normally talk about. No one should feel that they cannot talk about the extreme pressure they are under or that they're feeling overwhelmed. This includes line managers themselves.

*Consider these words from Joseph Grenny (Co-founder of VitalSmarts, who support us with delivery of our Crucial Conversations workshops). He wrote them in response to the current crisis:*

Make employees feel safe by making the undiscussable discussable. Effective leaders will understand that they must not just make their employees be safe, they must make them feel safe. The best way to help people feel safe is to make the undiscussable discussable. This must be done through human contact not mass emails. People don't feel reassured by a well-crafted document. They feel reassured when a human being looks them in the eye and explains what they are doing to ensure they are safe right here, right now.

- If you are a member of staff struggling to juggle a range of complex responsibilities (of which work is only one), please don't feel that you have to do it all. We are not expected to carry on as normal at this time. Speak with your line manager about what you can do. Be realistic. If you are not able to respond to requests, you should feel free to say so without any fear of repercussions.
- When looking at working arrangements, flexibility is the key, even more so in the current context. Be aware that a call booked for 2.00pm may not happen at precisely 2.00pm because other priorities take over. Know that that is OK. Talk about how you can make other arrangements and what is possible for you.

## ORGANISING WORKLOAD: Identifying solutions

There are, quite simply, no straightforward solutions because what works for one person will not necessarily work for another. Each person's COPE Framework will be different.

There is lots of guidance freely available online, some of it more helpful than others. We find there are many articles and resources which are of practical support on the [Harvard Business Review](#) web pages.

Not all of these are commercially-focused and some relate specifically to HE. At present you can sign up for free to their Coronavirus-related articles and for daily alerts. There are some very helpful and insightful articles on caring for dependants (children and older dependants) whilst working from home.

Here is one that focuses specifically on [remote working](#) during the Coronavirus pandemic. It includes some simple and practical questions managers can ask their staff:

- How are you, and what are you doing to look after yourself?
- What can I do to make sure that this transition is working for you?
- What's the best way that we can work together?

The most important thing is to generate discussion, which in turn promotes trust. No one should feel fearful of saying they feel overwhelmed or are unable to cope.

## SOME OPTIONS TO CONSIDER

One size will not fit all – but on the next page are some options you might find work for you when putting your COPE Framework together. Please refer to supporting policies and procedures on the [HR web pages](#) where you need to, explore them with your line manager, and look at how they could work for you in your role.

We recognise that many staff will be facing particular challenges not only relating to the care of dependants, but perhaps also in relation to their own disabilities or chronic health issues. These pressures may be more acute at present on account of certain NHS services being suspended. We encourage you to have a look at all of the additional guidance on topics such as Flexible Working and Disability in Employment in the University's [Equality and Diversity Staff Policies](#).

Much will depend on the local context, which is why the understanding and support of all of our line managers is especially important at this time.

Since the introduction of this COPE Framework in April, we have heard from many staff how helpful a COPE discussion with their line manager has been.



### **Structuring the working day**

For those staff who have defined working hours, and because of other priorities are finding it difficult to adhere to those hours, there may be an opportunity to flex these hours. For example, someone working mornings may, with the support of their line manager, find it easier to spread their hours over the course of the day or week, to allow for caring responsibilities and other priorities. Agree where the boundaries might be – and accept that these may need to change.

The same principles apply for those who have no defined working hours (mainly academic staff and those working at Grade 7 and above).

The message is clear – do what you can, when you can, as best you can. Due to the wide range of activities and services at Kent, we cannot provide definitive guidance on what can be set aside or dropped – this needs to be agreed locally. So discuss and explore what might work for you and what will help you to cope better. Recognise that you're unlikely to be as productive as usual from a work perspective. Your wellbeing is the priority.

### **Home schooling**

We recognise that this is one of the most extreme challenges of the current situation. If you are one of the many staff being asked to juggle responsibilities which now include home schooling, we will work with you to enable you to support your child or children in this way. If you feel that you cannot take on a particular task, please say so. Speak with your line manager and, if the work is deemed essential, together explore ways of reprioritising or redistributing it (without placing a disproportionate burden on others). You have the University's support to have these discussions and to feel safe and encouraged doing so. This also applies to staff with other caring responsibilities.

### **Email contact**

Again this will depend on individual circumstances and preferences. Some teams have agreed a moratorium on early morning or evening emails, or even an email-free day per week. Other staff, particularly those with caring responsibilities, might find that evenings are the best time to catch up with their emails, and doing so relieves rather than increases pressure. Discuss what's best for you and your team. Be supportive and flexible if, for whatever reason, your colleagues are not able to respond to your emails at the time that happens to suit you.

### **Working part-time**

Some full-time staff may feel that moving to a four-day working week on a temporary basis would help them better balance their lives. The suggestion is that this could be a temporary move for up to 12 weeks, with an associated adjustment to pay, after which time they could return to full-time working and their current terms of employment. Alongside this option there would need to be a real promise of respite (from work) on the day they are not at work. This is a suggestion that has been explored and endorsed by EG, as another means of offering options that may alleviate stress for some colleagues. It can be administered in the same way as any other temporary change to contract.

**Sharing what works for you**

We know that many staff are finding some solace in sharing their frustrations and anxieties with their colleagues, which is a reflection of the strong and supportive community we have here at Kent.

What we're also starting to see, and welcome, is the emergence of the sharing of hints and tips for overcoming challenges and finding ways of minimising stress and anxiety. As well as guidance on wellbeing and health, there are also many more simple yet effective ideas, such as leaving your phone in another room during family time.

Creating some shared spaces for you and your team to connect, support each other and re-energise will ease some of the pressures we are all experiencing, and help us cope.

<p><b>Take your annual leave, where you can, and make time to rest and renew your emotional resources</b></p>	<p><b>Prioritise your own wellbeing and the wellbeing of those close to you</b></p>	<p><b>Speak with your line manager and explore options to help you re-prioritise your workload</b></p>
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Since the introduction of the COPE Framework in April, we have heard from staff who have created dedicated wellbeing channels on Microsoft Teams, and are finding these very helpful.

## PREPARING for new ways of working: COMMUNICATION



Our IS colleagues have ensured that, wherever possible, we have all the technology we need to work remotely. Although plans are underway for a gradual return to campus, we are all uncertain about how long this way of working might need to continue.

Here are some additional tips to consider, in addition to the wide range of guidance online to support with remote working. Whilst connecting with colleagues is critical to ward off any feelings of social isolation, it's also important to minimise the interruptions and disruptors that can add to our stress levels.

- Bear in mind that we don't all have the same levels of digital competence or enjoyment of digital communication. Whilst most staff are finding that MS Teams, Zoom and so on are fairly intuitive, those new to them may take a little time to get used to this form of communication. Accept that people are going to have to dip in and out of conference calls because of other pressures
- When using email, try not to 'Reply All' with acknowledgement messages such as 'thanks' or 'great'. It means people think they have more emails to respond to than they have, which can in itself be a stressor
- Don't be tempted to overuse 'bcc' and 'cc' on emails, in an effort to stay connected, in order to keep everyone informed. It's probably more likely that you will simply extend your colleagues' working day as they have more emails to read



- Find a balance between synchronous ('respond immediately') and asynchronous ('respond later') communications. IM and group-messaging apps are great for keeping connected and for less formal communications, but bear in mind that:
  - staff with more reflective approaches may prefer to digest the information and not feel under pressure to respond immediately
  - many of our neurodivergent colleagues in particular find that a constant stream of chat messages and emails expecting an immediate response is an unnecessary stressor and distraction
  - especially at the current time, we should avoid presenteeism and not feel under pressure to be constantly 'at our desks'
  - when you say you'll check in with someone 'at lunchtime' or 'at the end of the day', remember that what they consider to be lunchtime or the end of their working day may be very different from yours – be as precise as you can to avoid misunderstandings
  
- If keeping on top of your email correspondence is proving to be a challenge because of other priorities, we encourage you to make regular and frequent use of an automated reply that, at times when you are not working, lets people know your working arrangements and when they might expect a response
  
- Try to be as clear and concise in your emails as possible, to avoid taking up unnecessary time in someone's day. You might not always be able to meet the ['five sentences'](#) standard, but you can probably come closer to it than you think
  
- Ask yourself 'Is my message going to be useful and effective?' before you press Send

Finally, for those completely new to virtual meetings and conference calls, we found a [free online session](#) (approx. 30 minutes) from Learning Coach Hedda Bird that will help you learn how to engage others, reach decisions and feel more comfortable in this virtual setting.



## PREPARING for new ways of working: REMOTE MEETING MANAGEMENT & PRACTICE

Most of us are becoming more familiar with virtual meetings on platforms such as MS Teams or Zoom. Whilst it's great to be able to continue to connect with colleagues in this way, lengthy remote meetings can be intense and some people find them more tiring than in-person discussions.

Here are some hints and tips you may find helpful as we become more used to communicating virtually:

### Meeting practices

- Most of the good practices we bring to face-to-face meetings should still apply to the virtual environment (good agenda management, agreeing ground rules, ensuring everyone has a chance to contribute etc)
- Try to minimise the number of meetings where participants 'round the table' simply report and update on what they've done since the group last met. This type of update can often be done more effectively outside a meeting by sharing files with clear notes
- Many people report that they find the longer remote meetings more intense and tiring than they'd anticipated. To support staff wellbeing, **we strongly recommend taking a short break in any meeting lasting 60 minutes or more**. This doesn't have to be for long – a few minutes to step away from the computer and stretch or walk around can be all it takes to re-energise and re-invigorate. A 'thumbs up' from people in the meeting chat when they come back can be helpful so that the chair knows when to restart.



- **Cameras on or off?** It's a delicate balance – there is increasing commentary about how draining it can be to have your camera on for longer meetings (say, two hours or more). We suggest agreeing this as part of the ground rules for the meeting. As a courtesy - and where possible – it's preferable to switch your camera on when you're speaking or asking a question.

- **To record or not record?** Again this will depend on the nature and purpose of the meeting but it is an important consideration. Recording a meeting or presentation can be extremely helpful for those who could not attend and want/need to catch up. However if you are looking for lots of discussion or questions about a potentially sensitive issue, recording may inhibit participation and you may decide not to record. In either case, this should be by agreement with the participants and everyone should be made aware of how any recording will be stored and used

### **Chairing a remote meeting**

- Remember that your own mindset about virtual meeting management will transfer to the participants. If you don't enjoy this type of meeting, or you're obviously uncomfortable about the technology, this will come across and participants will focus on your approach rather than the meeting purpose and content
- Having a moderator or administrator on the call can be very helpful – they can manage the technology and make sure that 'raised hands' and questions/comments on the 'chat' are not overlooked. They can also check in with someone who hasn't participated for a while, to make sure that all is OK
- Allow for longer pauses and silence before following up, after you ask a question or invite contributions. This may feel awkward at first, as you can't tune into the social cues (especially if cameras are switched off), but is typical of virtual meetings and gives people time to think as well as switch their microphone/camera back on
- If you're sharing your screen, do be mindful that what you show can be screen-shotted by others on the call and shared outside the meeting
- After a formal meeting, it can be useful to invite participants to stay on the call for a few minutes and debrief on what went well and what might need to be done differently next time in the virtual setting

### **Participating in a remote meeting**

- As with all meetings – remote or otherwise – there are two final principles to bear in mind:

**BE RESPECTFUL** – and mindful of others' time and contribution.

**BE PRESENT** - there is increasing commentary suggesting that trying to multi-task (checking emails, completing other work) in a virtual setting can be more tiring than focusing on the meeting itself.

## ENABLING OURSELVES TO STAY WELL: Employee Assistance Programme

It is important that, if you feel you are genuinely unable to cope, you have access to a confidential counselling service where you can speak with a trained BACP Counsellor on a completely confidential basis.

You may already know that one of the ways the University shows its commitment to the health and wellbeing of its staff is by choosing to provide an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), through the external provider Care first / Sodexo. You will find full details of the programme and how to access it on the [Occupational Health](#) web pages.

<b>Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)</b>
<b>Employee Assistance Programme - Care First</b>
EAP Frequently Asked Questions
EAP Call Answering Process
EAP Confidentiality
EAP Care first Information Services
EAP Your EAP Management Support
Information Posters

You will see on these pages that our colleagues in Occupational Health have set out full details of what the service offers, how to access it, the confidential nature of the service, and a range of Frequently Asked Questions.

You will need a password to access the Care first site, which you will find on the Occupational Health EAP home page by using the above link. There is a dedicated section on the Care first site for managers, with general advice on supporting their staff.

Through this service all staff can access confidential support on a wide range of issues under the following headings:



Under each grouping there is a range of information. For example, the At Home section includes information on caring responsibilities, relationships and managing finances. You may also call the service on their Counselling & Information line:

**0808 168 2143**

## ENABLING OURSELVES TO STAY WELL: Other helpful resources to help you COPE

Here are some additional resources that you might find useful to help you cope more effectively and reduce pressure at this time:

We find the [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development](#) (CIPD) has some of the most helpful and practical tips for staff and managers on current working arrangements. Their website is very busy at the moment but do persevere. Much of the Coronavirus-related guidance can be accessed without being a CIPD member. Do be aware that, as this is general guidance, some of the policies they refer to might differ from our own at Kent.

# CIPD



Listen to the this webinar by Ann Francke from the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) and Simon Blake, chief executive of Mental Health First Aid England (MHFA), about managing the mental health effects of prolonged quarantine/isolation and the uncertainty that we all face.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mleooA34W9I&feature=emb\\_logo&utm\\_source=Chartered+Management+Institute&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=11437964 MEM RK BM4 270320](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mleooA34W9I&feature=emb_logo&utm_source=Chartered+Management+Institute&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=11437964_MEM_RK_BM4_270320_Post+Exp)  
[\\_Post+Exp](#) (33.04 Minutes)

Read this article by Dods Diversity & Inclusion, about how to 'Manage from Afar'. They also have other useful resources on how to maintain motivation and restore perspective at this time.

[https://www.dodsdiversity.com/news/view,managing-from-afar-supporting-your-team-during-the-covid19-pandemic\\_194.htm?utm\\_campaign=31MAR20-%28DI%29-Newsletter%20COVID-19%2031%20March-%28Grace%29&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Eloqua](https://www.dodsdiversity.com/news/view,managing-from-afar-supporting-your-team-during-the-covid19-pandemic_194.htm?utm_campaign=31MAR20-%28DI%29-Newsletter%20COVID-19%2031%20March-%28Grace%29&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Eloqua)





Mind have also issued information about how you can look out for your mental health during the current period of uncertainty. It covers:

[Practical advice for staying at home](#)

[Taking care of your mental health and wellbeing](#)

[Support for work, benefits and housing](#)

[Checklist for staying at home](#)

The link below will take you to the Mind webpage on Coronavirus and your wellbeing:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

The University is exploring how it might incorporate the [Thriving at Work](#) standards. Thriving at Work is an independent review of mental health commissioned by Government. It sets out six mental health core standards for employers, drawn from best practice and the available evidence base. The report also outlines a series of more ambitious 'enhanced' standards for employers to consider.





## WHAT NEXT?



We hope you have found this short pack useful, and that you will find a combination of practical ideas for you to explore, and reassurance about the University's commitment to supporting your wellbeing and helping you feel more able to cope at this difficult time.

**Please now use these and other resources available to you to draw up your individual COPE Framework with your manager.** We ask that managers instigate the discussion, but if they don't (due to the pressure on them, too), do forward some ideas to them by email.

The Framework can be in whatever format suits you, but should include consideration of how you'll best:

- **Collaborate**, work together and support each other
- **Organise** and prioritise your workload, in a way that relieves the pressure many staff are feeling
- **Prepare** for ongoing uncertainty and minimise any challenges and difficulties further down the line
- **Enable** yourself to stay well over the time to come, drawing on some of the resources we have included in this pack, including, if you are feeling overwhelmed, the [Employee Assistance Programme](#)

With so many varied arrangements for individuals and teams, we encourage line managers to keep a spreadsheet record (or whatever works best for you) of what's been discussed and agreed with each member of their team, which can be added to and adapted as required.

And don't forget to tell us (by email on [framework@kent.ac.uk](mailto:framework@kent.ac.uk)) what you're finding works for you, or anything you think would be helpful to include in future versions of this resource pack.

If you require this document in another format to meet accessibility needs please contact [Ldev@kent.ac.uk](mailto:Ldev@kent.ac.uk).