



# e-Newsletter

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## Two New OCWR Programs to Combat Stress in the Remote Workspace

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly altered the work environment for many on Capitol Hill. As the number of staff assigned to full-time telework status has increased, employees are experiencing less social and physical support. While telework has its benefits, some employees are experiencing increased feelings of isolation and stress. A decreased sense of community and belonging is often associated with higher levels of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and cognitive and musculoskeletal stress.

To address these issues, the OCWR is developing two new programs related to office operations in the remote work environment: new **ergonomics guidance** to assist employing offices in developing or updating their own in-house ergonomics programs, and **workplace civility and inclusion training** that includes a special component related to the remote work environment.

The upcoming **ergonomics guidance** will focus on designing ergonomic office spaces that provide many key advantages for both employees and employers, including 1) increased employee focus, attention, and engagement, 2) enhanced productivity and work quality, 3) improved employee morale, mood, and energy level, 4) reduced employee stress, 5) lowered risk of developing musculoskeletal disorders, and 6) minimized business costs associated with employee injuries and absenteeism.

Added to the unique physical issues inherent in today's teleworking lifestyle are new office etiquette issues, which require a reexamination of our traditional conceptions of workplace civility. From emails to video and voice-only teleconferencing calls, the remote office has suddenly and dramatically changed. The OCWR is addressing these changes with a new training module on **workplace civility and inclusion** that highlights workplace courtesy and best practices and addresses issues specific to the telework environment.

Be on the lookout for these innovative and helpful programs coming soon from the OCWR or call the office for more details.

The OCWR also offers other live virtual, live training sessions on Understanding Implicit Bias, The Congressional Accountability Act, and Racial Justice in the Workplace. For more information, go to the OCWR training page at [ocwr.gov](https://www.ocwr.gov) (<https://www.ocwr.gov/resources-and-training>) or contact the OCWR.

And please check out our Fast Fact, [Working From Home During A Pandemic](#). This information sheet outlines the challenges of full-time teleworking and the benefits of creating a structured and ergonomically safe at-home work environment.

**WORKING FROM HOME DURING A PANDEMIC FAST FACTS**

In an effort to slow the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), employees are required or have chosen to stay at home to limit close contact with others. While many employees may be accustomed to teleworking 1-2 days per week, full-time teleworking has become a temporary lifestyle and poses many challenges. Here are six tips to help with adjusting to your new workspace while maintaining your productivity.

- 1) LOCATION**  
Create a workspace in your home that you can associate with your job and leave when you are off the clock. This workspace can be the corner of your kitchen table or a home office. Make sure your workspace is as comfortable as possible and include potted plants, family photos, candles, an ergonomic chair, etc.
- 2) SET A SCHEDULE AND MAKE A LIST**  
Structure is extremely important during this time. You list can include tasks you would like to accomplish for the day, breaks that you need to take, your log-off time, and bedtime. Make time for physical and creative activities (i.e., taking a walk, virtual exercise classes, crafts, home projects, cleaning, cooking, etc.). If you have children, try to replicate their school schedule and maintain a consistent routine.
- 3) ERGONOMICS**  
Using an improper workstation for an extended period of time can increase the risk of ergonomic-related injuries of the neck, shoulder, and back. It is suggested that you use a table or a desk instead of a couch or a bed as your workspace. Use a good chair if possible, and add pillows for back support. Raise your monitor or laptop to eye level to prevent strain to neck muscles. The laptop can be raised to eye level by using a laptop stand or everyday items such as hardware boxes or sturdy boxes—as long as they provide a secure base. If your laptop is raised to eye level, you will need to use an external mouse and keyboard. The images here are examples of proper and improper workstation setups.
- 4) THE NEW "COMMUTE"**  
Transition into your workday. Start your day with a shower, getting dressed, yoga, or a morning walk. Incorporating an activity into your morning routine can take the place of your normal commute to work. The activity sends a similar message to the brain that it is time to go to work!
- 5) FIND A BUDDY OR A COLLEAGUE**  
Social interactions can alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation. Video calling your colleagues, friends, and/or family members is not a bad idea. It may even increase your productivity.
- 6) MANAGE EXPECTATIONS**  
Work communication is necessary during this time. Discuss what your team's priorities are, and how tasks will be completed. How are teams going to track the projects they are working on? How will they meet to discuss their work? Are all team meetings at a certain day and time to coordinate with everyone? Be honest about what is not working or cannot get done in these circumstances!

**REFERENCES:**

- <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/10-tips-working-remote-during-coronavirus-2019-10-09>
- <https://www.oregonstate.edu/ergonomics/tips-for-working-from-home/>
- <https://www.everydayhealth.com/healthy-living/your-work-from-home-ergonomic-guide-to-get-started/>
- <https://www.comfort2020desk.com/remote-work-from-home-ergonomic-guide-to-get-started/>
- <https://www.ocwr.gov/2020/05/18/5-ways-to-keep-your-work-from-home-healthy-2020/>

## The FFCRA Is Set to Expire on December 31



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The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), which provides paid leave for either a covered legislative branch employee's own health needs or to care for family members during the COVID-19 pandemic, is currently set to expire on December 31, 2020. This important legislation, ensures that covered employees are not forced to choose between their paychecks and public health measures. More detailed information on the FFCRA can be found at [ocwr.gov/coronavirus](https://www.ocwr.gov/coronavirus) or by contacting the OCWR.