



## Communication and Social Distance

During this time of social distancing, strong communication skills are more important than ever. Communicating primarily by phone or written word eliminates many of the non-verbal cues most people use to indicate what they are thinking or feeling, and could result in misunderstandings or conflict.

If you're struggling to communicate effectively while working apart from your colleagues, try these tips:

- ▶ **Learn technology.** The Internet makes it easier for people to work from home or at a distance, but it may require some basic technological skills. If possible, take the time to test video conferencing software before you try to use it in a professional setting. Instead of getting frustrated, have fun with miscues. Technology offers options for connecting with friends and family too. Find an app that works for everyone and set up a virtual family dinner.

- ▶ **Listen.** When you're speaking with someone on the phone or on video chat, stay off your computer or other devices unless using them is necessary to the conversation. Focus your attention on the other person, just as you would if you were in the same room with them.
- ▶ **Ditch preconceptions.** Don't assume that you know what someone else is thinking. Instead, use open-ended questions, such as, "Can you describe what your ideal outcome would be?" This will encourage the person to articulate their thoughts and feelings in more detail. Use clear, specific language to describe your own ideas and point of view.

- ▶ **Be kind.** Many people are feeling stressed or uncertain right now. Take the time to ask how colleagues are coping and provide support. Be patient with extra challenges related to working from a distance.

Improving communication skills will have a lasting impact, and could strengthen not just work relationships, but personal ones as well. For 24/7/365 assistance with communicating more effectively, contact LifeMatters.



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