

Lockdown Letters

‘One thing’s for sure – employees are not going back into the office five days a week when this is over’

Maeve Halpin, a counselling psychologist based in Ranelagh, discusses the future of working environments and the current challenges faced by many during this confusing time

Maeve Halpin in Dublin // April 06 2020 01:30 AM



As a counsellor, I'm lucky that I can keep working remotely, seeing my clients on Whatsapp video or having sessions over the phone.

One thing is for sure – employees are not going back into the office five days a week when this is all over. Many people are appreciating not having to commute, as well as being able to weave their household duties into their work day. They find they are less stressed and more productive.

Some, of course, miss the social aspect of their workplace. I anticipate that in the future, employers will be expected to offer more flexibility in relation to home working.

This can cut company office rental costs and liberate our cities and towns from needless rush hour traffic. A decrease in air pollution and in the incidence of traffic accidents will be a further bonus.

Anxious times

The unknown can evoke fear, manifesting as a nameless and free-floating anxiety. I have noticed many people having unexpected arguments with people they usually get on with. We are cooped up with our families and housemates, all of us stressed by uncertainty and lack of routine.

As a safety valve, we can try to ensure that we have some time to ourselves, at least once a day. We can respect others' need for personal space.

I suggest to my clients to try to respond with compassion, if someone seems unreasonable and argumentative. We all need to cut each other a bit of slack during these confusing and trying times.

Counselling services

Counselling services are still available, albeit with the use of technology.

Most companies and organisations, including the Public Service, provide a limited number of free counselling sessions (as part of their Employee Assistance Programme) to their staff.

Some charitable organisations also provide this service to their volunteers. Details will usually be found on the internal company website or from the Human Resources department.

Many of us are enjoying the slower pace of life and relishing time at home with our families. But for some, relationship and family tensions are heightened. Financial insecurity, job losses and loneliness may also present significant challenges.

Counselling can provide a place to emotionally offload, gain perspective and acquire the skills needed to navigate the uncertain waters ahead.