

# 8 tips to manage work/life tension when you work from home

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When you work from home, you may find that home is no longer a haven from a stressful workday. Try these tips to keep both the work and home parts of your life running as smoothly as you can.



## 1. Make a detailed list of what you're worried about before you end your workday.

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Research suggests that writing down this information helps your brain let go of it before you transition to home life. Be as detailed as possible. For example:

**Poor:** Brainstorm how company uncertainty might affect our projects.

**Better:** Starting with the Avalon project, investigate: 1) what we might change (starting with adjusting the release date); 2) who I need to get input from to make an informed decision; 3) the cost-benefit of each possible change.

With a less-detailed list, you prime your mind to generate relevant thoughts throughout your evening to fill in the gaps, interrupting your recharge time. Whereas a detailed list may reduce the likelihood of worrying before you start work the next day. Or, if you do end up having additional work thoughts, at least they'll be more specific (e.g., I should see what Piyush thinks about Avalon) — something you can quickly jot down before returning to your home life.

## 2. Devise an end-of-day routine to create mental space from work.

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Even if you're just closing your laptop to transition from work life to home life, there's plenty you can do to make that shift a clear one. Depending on your situation, you could cool off with a quick workout, take a walk around the neighborhood, do a family activity, call a friend or relative, read a novel for 30 minutes, or anything else that helps your mind shift gears to home life.

Want to be sure you stick with it? Set an end time for your workday and schedule your transition routine for that time — with another person, if possible. If you know that someone is anticipating your attention at a certain time, you'll have extra incentive to be productive throughout the day so that you can stop work in time to keep your commitment.

### **3. Establish work-free zones/times at home.**

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Many people already find it challenging to resist spending their evenings pounding away on their computers or checking work email on their phones. In times of uncertainty, restricting yourself may be even harder — some people focus on the work they know and can control as a way to avoid dwelling on the turbulence around them. Others may fear for their jobs and want to put in long hours to show they're indispensable. Even if it makes sense for you to temporarily work longer hours, you'll still need to turn off at some point each day.

Determine whatever rules work for you and your household: Maybe it's no working past 6 p.m. or no business at the dinner table or no checking email except at one designated time each evening. Consider also banning screens from your bedroom — most sleep experts agree that the extra light and mental activity can disrupt sleep. And enlist your household to help enforce the rules, whether that means just pointing out your infractions or requiring you to pay a fine to the family fun jar.

### **4. Block out time in your work calendar for home events.**

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If you're the type who lives by your calendar or your colleagues rely on your calendar to determine when you're available, this tactic can help you commit to and focus on home life activities — like walking the dog, watching a movie with your family, or unclogging the sink — and not on habitually checking emails or taking work calls at home.

### **5. Set email off-hours for your team.**

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Even in normal times, your direct reports likely feel pressure to respond quickly to emails they receive during their time off. So, they may feel especially compelled to do so in fearful times. When you set a proactive expectation with your team that no one should send or respond to messages during specific times, you'll help your team establish positive work/life boundaries and also free yourself to focus more on what's going on at home.

As you consider off-hours for your team, be sure that you:

- Pick times (e.g., weekends and before 8 a.m. and after 6 p.m. on weekdays) that work best for your team, including remote workers in different time zones.
- Establish what to do in emergencies (e.g., text or call instead of email).
- Lead by example (if you don't stick to the rule, then your team won't either).

- Give feedback on lapses (e.g., “*Thanks for being on top of this, Ariana. But as a reminder, please resist the urge to send emails after hours. It’s important for everyone to get uninterrupted time away from work — including you!*”).

## **6. When you complain about work to your partner, be explicit about what you want from the conversation.**

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It’s a classic relationship dynamic (and a chief complaint of respondents in [our survey of 200 people about how their partner’s job hurts their home life](#)): You unload about your work frustrations, then ignore or get upset with your partner’s advice. It’s also simple to improve.

Often, the friction comes from a misalignment on the purpose of the conversation: One person wants to vent and the other sees it as an ask for help. As one survey respondent put it: “For a long time I didn’t understand that he was just complaining to complain, that people complain about things that they don’t really want fixed.”

For a healthier dynamic, try employing respectful communication techniques recommended by relationship and leadership experts alike:

- Ask if this is a good time to share a frustration. The moment your partner walks in the door or the moment you finish a difficult meeting is rarely a good time.
- Include the amount of time you think it will take (and stick to it).
- Let your partner know what you need from the conversation, whether that’s just someone to vent to, validation of your feelings, or help solving a problem.

For example, “*Would it be OK if I vent about a frustrating meeting for five minutes? I just want to vent*” or “*Do you have 10 minutes? I could use your advice on a work problem ...*”

## **7. Establish a network of people with whom you can talk through work-related issues.**

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Sure, it’s easy to default to sharing work problems with the people you talk with most when you’re not working — your friends and partner. But work peers, mentors, or other colleagues may be better equipped to offer more nuanced understanding and advice, since they’re more familiar with your workplace and industry. And, by tapping those in your work sphere, you’ll spare your friends and partner — and preserve your free time for nonwork-related topics.

When you connect with colleagues about work issues, just be sure you’re actually asking for and listening to their well-intentioned advice, not merely having [an unproductive gripe session](#).

Finally, remember that during times of company or economic uncertainty, it’s even more important to check in, gauge how people are doing, and share experiences and strategies for coping. So, consider adding peer check-ins to your calendar and starting your 1-on-1s with

direct reports with a few minutes on how each of you is coping.

## 8. Directly address a work issue that's causing you frustration.

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In [our survey of 200 people about how their partner's job hurts their home life](#), respondents spoke of the stormy moods that roll in with their partners after work — “snappy” and “irritable” attitudes that often spark fights and take a toll on the household. “It inhibits my ability to relax after my *own* long, hard day,” one said.

One obvious but not-so-easy solution: Work on improving whatever crummy situation at work is causing you tension. Keep in mind that you may not need to fully solve a problem in order to relieve stress. For example, if you're [worried that a remote direct report isn't actually working](#), simply asking “*How are you handling working from home?*” may be all you need to do to learn that the person is dealing with a personal issue or has misaligned priorities — clarity that can relieve your frustration and enable you both to focus on an appropriate solution.

For more on common frustrations, see [I'm avoiding a difficult conversation](#), [There's too much company change at once](#), or [50+ common problems managers face and ways to handle them](#).

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