

# Transitioning into the Workplace

A RESOURCE FOR FRESH GRADUATES



In Hong Kong, over 20,000 graduate from university annually and the majority enter the workforce soon after. **Transitioning to a new environment, adapting to new norms and culture, and handling ambiguous boundaries and goals can be frustrating** - it has been made especially hard during COVID-19. Around one-third of 'workplace freshmen' report feeling anxious, with key concerns about job performance and interpersonal relationships ([Taiwan Jobs, 2017](#)). These trends are relevant here in Hong Kong, where 36% of young adults in the workplace experience depressive and/or anxiety symptoms ([CUHK, 2018](#)).

The transition period between university and work is important to address, in order to ensure good mental well-being. **Our brains and our capacity to regulate emotions continue to develop until we're about 25 years old.** Also, 75% of mental health problems develop before the age of 24 years. This means that young people are particularly vulnerable to stressors during this period. Luckily, intervention is especially effective during the time that our brains are developing, so making sure you and others around you get the right support is incredibly important.



# Adapting to new environment

## How adaptation and change can impact mental health

The transition to the workforce is a big one. There may be other significant changes that occur alongside it, such as moving to a new area or home, or shifting friendship networks. The COVID-19 pandemic has added some other unique challenges, such as financial concerns, lack of in-person social networks in the workplace, and others. Changes, even positive ones, can cause feelings of stress and uncertainty. **Not knowing what to expect can be uncomfortable and will naturally generate some worry.** For some, the stress associated with change can feel overwhelming and can impact their mental health. It is important to pay attention to how you're feeling and reach out for support if you're struggling.

## Learn about the work culture

Learning about your work environment and culture can help you gain a better understanding of your workplace and the people around you. **It reduces conflict and miscommunication and facilitates relationships with colleagues.** Observing and listening to interactions between coworkers can help you to understand the common practices in the office.



## Manage expectations

When adapting to a new role, it is normal to feel lost and question whether you are doing what you have been asked to do, and doubt your capability of performing well in this job.

To manage this, print out or write down your job description, and pin it to a place where you can see it. Whenever you are in doubt, take a look at the job description and reflect on whether you have completed your role's responsibilities. It is also a great way to remind yourself of your goals and set boundaries.

## Balance between your values and the work culture

Sometimes the workplace culture may differ from your personal values and beliefs, which can be frustrating. This does not mean you need to completely change to fit in or quit because it violates your values. **Find a balance and explore the middle ground** that minimises the impact of your work, while still holding on to your beliefs and values.

## Give yourself a break



It takes time to adapt to a new environment, especially if you are working from home. Give yourself a break if you are having trouble adjusting to a new culture. However, if you are really struggling in your new workplace, try to discuss this with your line manager or colleagues you trust to see if there are other ways to help you adjust better.

# Meeting new people

Developing good connections with your colleagues can help you to build a support network and make the workplace a more enjoyable place. Here are some of the ways you can develop connections with your colleagues:

- **Have lunch together.** Go out for lunch with your colleagues, or simply grab lunch together, so you can get to know more about each other.
- **Find common ground.** Find common interests and hobbies that both of you enjoy, so you have something positive to talk about and improve your relationships.
- **Team building.** Joining team building activities to get to know your colleagues, and to skill up communication and collaboration skills, which can help you to work more effectively.
- **Greet your colleagues before diving into work.** If you are working from home during the pandemic, greeting your colleagues gives you a chance to connect with your colleagues, and get to know more about them.
- **Turn on your camera if you are video-calling your colleagues.** This can be a way to show respect, so they know they are not talking to a computer. Turning on your camera also makes you more approachable and friendly.
- If you are working from home and not meeting a lot of people, **try setting up coffee or lunch chats with your colleagues** to get to know them - this can be done in person or by video call.



## Some points to consider before befriending your coworkers:

- **Be genuine.** Being genuine makes you more approachable and trustworthy.
- **Set your boundaries.** It is important to set your own boundaries, so your coworkers know what behaviours are acceptable and respect your personal space.
- **Respect others' boundaries.** Although it is great to have friends at work, not everyone is looking to create work relationships. Respect others' boundaries and personal space.



### What if I can't make new friends at work?

It's important to note that it's not always possible to have good personal relationships with all your colleagues. If you and your colleagues don't get along, keep a professional distance and show respect. It also helps you to stay focused on your work. **You don't have to force yourself to fit in just to be friends with your coworkers, but respect others**, as you are still working in the same environment.

## Managing Workplace conflict

Workplace conflict is sometimes unavoidable, and you might need to work with people you don't like, or their behaviours may affect your work.

- **Addressing your concerns.** If your coworker significantly impacts your work, you may want to address your concerns with them. Take some time to organise your feelings and thoughts, and explain it to them calmly to sort things out. If you do not want to talk to them, you may also seek help from HR or your line manager.
- **Avoid participating in gossip.** Although people think gossiping is a great way to bond, it may stir up workplace conflicts, which can put a strain on your relationship with colleagues.
- **Keep a professional distance.** If you and your colleagues do not get along well, keep a professional distance and stay focused on your work.

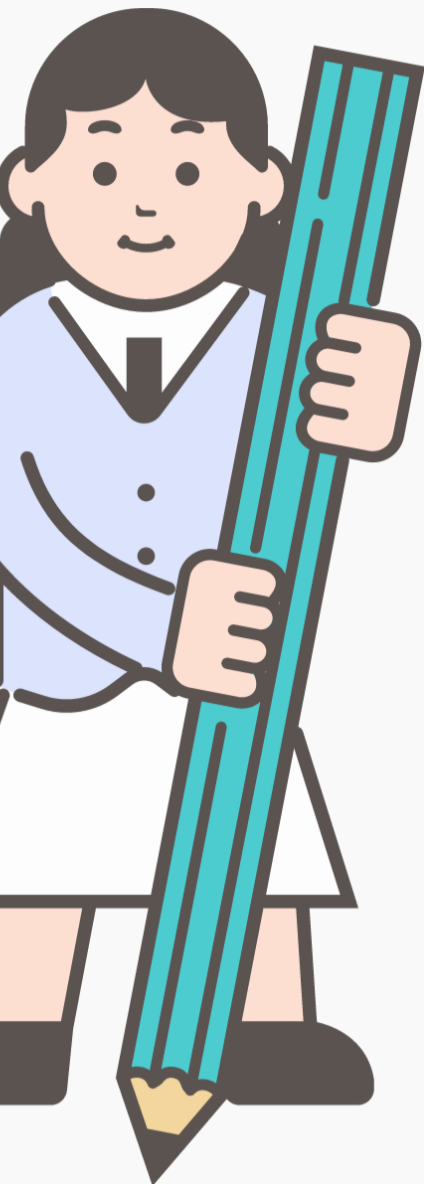


Learn more about managing workplace conflict here: [mind.org.hk/mental-health-a-to-z/mental-health-at-work/how-can-i-manage-conflict-at-work/](https://mind.org.hk/mental-health-a-to-z/mental-health-at-work/how-can-i-manage-conflict-at-work/)

# Managing your work

It is normal to feel lost and overwhelmed in the midst of work, especially when you are working on multiple projects at once. The sense of loneliness during COVID-19, due to lack of in-person support, may exacerbate these feelings. Here are some tips to help you regain some control over your work.

## Managing workloads

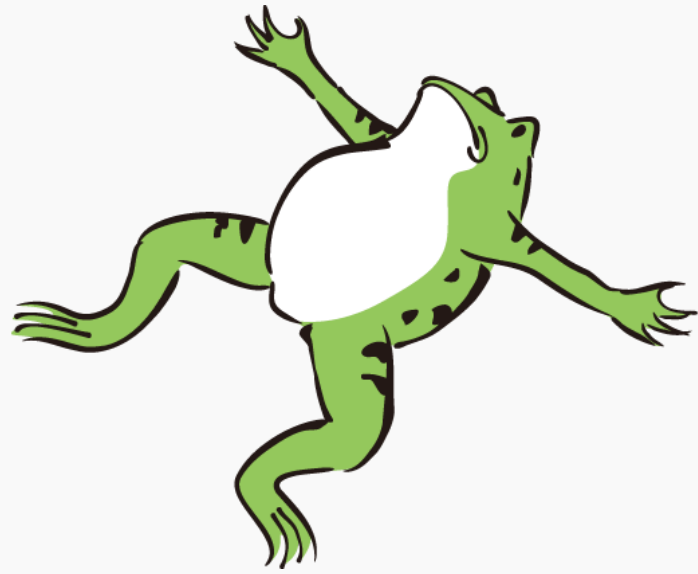


- **Briefly plan out your workflow at the start of the week.** This gives you a better idea of what your capacity looks like to help with external tasks or urgent work. Estimating the amount of time needed to complete a task also helps to manage your time better.
- **Keep a schedule of your work deadlines and meeting.** This helps you to organise your work time and allows you to plan around your workload. It can be a bullet journal, schedule book, or even a google calendar.
- **Visualising your work** helps you to prevent your brain from overloading with information; it is also a great way to identify anything that is unclear or uncertain. Some examples include writing down the tasks that you need to complete or visualising your workflow and ideas through mind maps or flowcharts.
- **Break down your work into smaller tasks.** For example, if you are writing up a report, break it down into different sessions and complete it part by part.



## Managing workloads

- **Communicate with your coworkers before you start working.** Go through your workflows together to avoid doubling the work, or any misunderstandings.
- **Schedule breaks between tasks.** Taking a break allows your brain to rest and be prepared for the next tasks. Completing routine tasks (e.g. replying to emails, filing papers, etc.) can also be a form of 'brain rest'.
- If you find yourself struggling with the amount of workload, you may want to **discuss this with your manager** to readjust your tasks and deadlines or acquire external help.



## To ask or not to ask?

Often times we are too afraid to ask because we are scared of being scolded or judged by our manager or coworker for asking 'stupid' questions. Ask your line manager or coworkers if you are uncertain - it is always better to be safe than sorry. If available, you can also check to see if there are any guidelines or templates that you can follow. If you are uncertain about the workflow, run your plans with coworkers before you start to avoid miscommunication.

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“I got a lot of questions but am too afraid to ask, because I am scared that people will think I am dumb.”

- Fresh Grad, age 22

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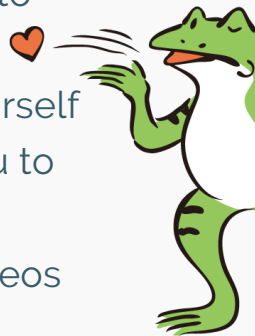
## When should I say 'No'?

Saying 'No' can be hard, but when you are already struggling with your own tasks, pushing yourself to do extra tasks may lead to burnout, and also affect the quality of work. Consider your capacity to complete the task before offering to help. If you are unable to help, explain to your colleague and offer alternative ways to help with the situation.

## Managing stress and building resilience

No matter if it is the stress from work or the high expectation that you set for yourself, here are some useful tips that can help you to manage your stress, or build your resilience to prepare yourself for future adversities:

- **Identify your stressors.** Keep a record of triggers that makes you stressed and identify useful coping strategies that help you to overcome the situation, so you can be better prepared next time.
- **Keep a compliment record.** Adapting to change is hard, and there will be times when you doubt yourself and lose the motivation to keep working. Keep a record of compliments from customers, coworkers, your manager, or even from yourself, to remind yourself that you are able to do it. This can be a motivation boost for you to keep going on.
- **Practise mindfulness or relaxation skills.** There are a lot of videos online and free apps that guide you through mindfulness or breathing exercises, which have been found to be helpful in managing stress in the long run.
- **Don't compare yourself with others.** It is easy to fall into a rabbit hole of comparing yourself with your coworkers or your friends. Although it can be a way to motivate yourself to do better, it puts a strain on yourself, and can negatively affect your mental health in the long run. Focus on your current tasks and find ways to improve your skills.



# Work-life balance

One of the biggest challenges is to maintain a work-life balance. Especially when you are still adapting to a new environment, new schedules and tasks can be overwhelming, you may find yourself sacrificing your private time to complete your work. Working from home diminishes the boundary between work and personal life - work-life balance needs to be made a priority if this is the case.



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“It is hard to hang out with my friends after full-time. Even if we did, we are all 'zombie-like', and we can't hang out too long cause everyone needs to leave early. My work and social life is not balanced at all.”

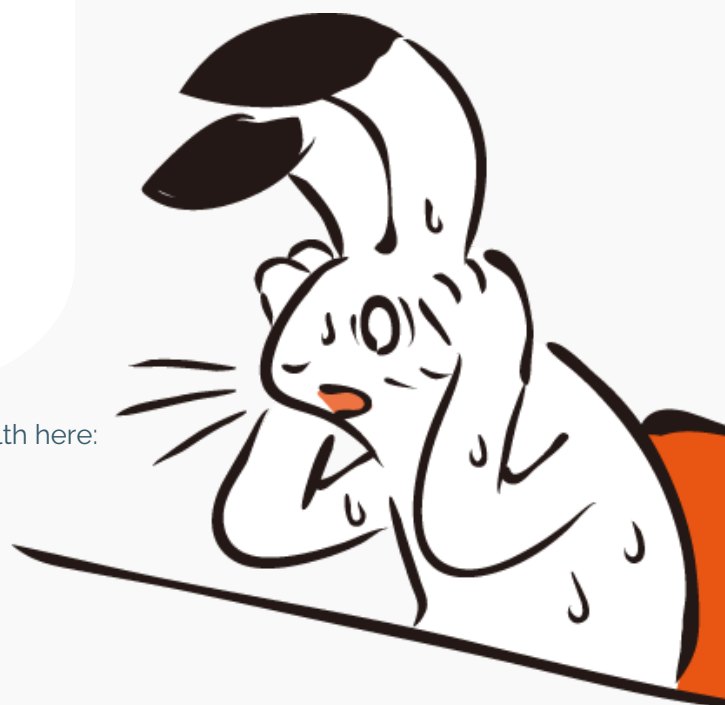
- Fresh Grad, age 22

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## Signs of burn out

- Fatigue and tired all the time
- Headache
- Feeling on edge or irritated
- Feeling trapped and helpless
- Loss of interest to activities
- Feels detached from the world
- Not wanting to meet friends or family

Learn more about the impact of stress on our mental health here:  
[mind.org.hk/mental-health-a-to-z/stress/about/](https://mind.org.hk/mental-health-a-to-z/stress/about/)



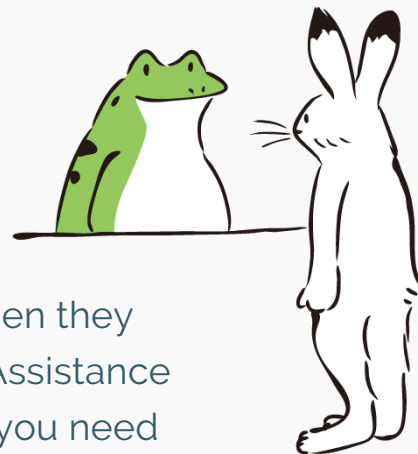
## Finding balance

Maintaining a work-life balance is never easy. This is especially true when you are new to the workplace and there is a lot of catching up to be done, or you feel the need to perform well and stand out from the crowd. We may find ourselves stressed out and on the verge of burning out just to complete our jobs or fit into the work environment. While finding balance takes time, here are some tips to help you to maintain a work-life balance:

- **Explore and set your boundaries.** For instance, setting a time to check and reply to emails or setting limits to your work hours. This is especially important during COVID-19 when many of us are working from home.
- **Shut off your computer during your off days,** so you won't have to worry about working during your off days. If you have installed email or communication software on your phone for work, turning off notifications also helps.
- **Turn on 'Do not disturb' mode on your phone at night.** Give yourself some me-time and use the time to do whatever you like - catching up with TV dramas, reading, listening to music, or sleeping.
- If you are working from home, **separate your workspace from your bedroom or resting area.** Environment greatly affects our perception - staying in your workspace helps you to focus on your tasks, heading to your resting area can signal you that your work time is over.
- **Pick up a new hobby.** This can help you to steer your mind off from work and temporarily escape from the hustle. It can be learning new instruments, new skills, or exercise.
- **Connect with friends and family.** Friends and family can be your support network when you are stressed. Just a text message or a phone call can already make a huge difference. You can also talk about other things to get your mind off work.



# Finding your social support



## Source of social support

A lot of people will turn to their friends and family when they are stressed. Some companies also offer Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to support employee wellbeing. If you need support for your workload, you may also discuss this with your manager, or the HR department, to see what help is available and what changes can be made.

## Sharing your struggles

If you are experiencing emotional distress or a mental health problem, you may want to talk to someone about how you feel. Some people may be concerned about opening up with their parents because they don't want their parents to be worried. If you don't feel comfortable discussing this with your family, you may consider talking to people you trust. **There are also online mental health support platforms that allow you to talk to someone anonymously:**

**OpenUp:** 24-hour chatroom for individuals aged between 11-35 English and Cantonese  
WhatsApp/SMS: 91 012 012  
Facebook/ Instagram/ Wechat: **hkopenup**

**Samaritan**  
**Befrienders Hong Kong Chatpoint**  
Chinese  
IOS/ Android mobile application: Chat<sub>隆</sub>

**uTouch**  
Chinese  
Whatsapp: 6277 8899  
Online counselling: **uTouch.hk**  
Instagram: **utouch\_hkfyg**

If you are experiencing a mental health problem and would like to seek professional help, help is available. There are free/ subsidised mental health services provided by local NGOs available. You may also visit your closest Integrated Community Centre for Mental Wellbeing (ICCMW) to look for mental health support. It is okay to take leave if you feel unwell - **sickness absence for your mental health is just as valid as absence for physical health problems.**

# ABOUT MIND HK

Mind HK, established as "Mind Mental Health Hong Kong Limited," is a **registered S88 charity (91/16471)** committed to **improving awareness and understanding of mental health in Hong Kong**. We collaborate with other local and international mental health charities and provide online support and training programmes, based on global best practice, to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem and equip them with the resources they need. Through collaborative research, Mind HK is leading the way in understanding mental health problems in the city and providing its population with the right support and resources.

## MIND HK'S MISSION AND VISION

- To ensure **everyone in Hong Kong living with a mental health problem has the recognition, support and respect they need to make the best recovery possible.**
- To provide partnership, collaboration, training, innovation and best practice to facilitate the work of all those involved in improving mental health in Hong Kong.
- To lead, promote and support the destigmatisation and transformation of community mental health care so that Hong Kong can become a global leader in the field and a model for other Asian cities.
- To research and audit these strategies and share them internationally.

## RELIABLE INFORMATION ON COVID-19

Centre for Health Protection:

<https://www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/index.html>

World Health Organisation (WHO):

[www.who.int/](http://www.who.int/)

If you want to learn more about other mental health topics, please visit **our mental health A to Z**: [www.mind.org.hk/mental-health-a-to-z/](http://www.mind.org.hk/mental-health-a-to-z/)

### USEFUL LINKS:

- [COVID-19 Mental Health Tips](#)
- [Mental health at work](#)
- [Seeking help in Hong Kong](#)



Coolminds is a joint youth mental health initiative by Mind HK and KELY Support Group.

For more youth mental health resources, visit: [www.coolmindshk.com](http://www.coolmindshk.com).

If you are experiencing strong levels of distress or trauma which are interfering with your life, remember that you do not have to face it alone, and that help is available.

### For emergency support please contact:

- Emergency hotline: 999
- The Samaritans 24-hour hotline (Multi-lingual): (852) 2896 0000
- Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong 24-hour hotline (Cantonese only): (852) 2389 2222
- Suicide Prevention Services 24-hour hotline (Cantonese only): (852) 2382 0000

- More crisis support services can be found here: [mind.org.hk/find-help-now](http://mind.org.hk/find-help-now)
- More non-urgent support services can be found here: [mind.org.hk/community-directory/](http://mind.org.hk/community-directory/)



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