



# 4 Things You Can't Ignore During the COVID-19 Crisis

In many ways, life seems to have been put on hold for both businesses and individuals as drastic steps were taken around the globe to address the spread of the coronavirus. Existing plans went out the window, while the daily concerns of most people turned simply to their own safety and the well-being of their families.

Now, employees worldwide are trying their best to adjust to a new normal and balance work and home life through shelter-in-place orders and other restrictions. With these newfound challenges top of mind, some ordinarily-important developments may slip through the cracks.

Below are four things to keep in mind—and ensure that your people are aware of as well—amid the current crisis.

## 1 Revised Tax Filing Date

While the typical filing date for federal income taxes has come and gone, the IRS thankfully acknowledged the additional burden the crisis placed on taxpayers during this period and extended the deadline to **July 15th, 2020**. If your business pays taxes on a quarterly basis, the first 2020 estimated quarterly payment is also due on this date. Payments owed on taxes from individuals, trusts and estates, corporations and other non-corporate tax filers (as well as those who pay self-employment tax), that would have been due on April 15th may also be deferred, without penalties or interest, until this July deadline.

There is some speculation that the deadline may be [extended even further](#). However, the IRS is still encouraging individuals who are due a refund to file as soon as possible. Most refunds are still being issued within three weeks (21 days), and often faster for taxes filed electronically, which could mean substantial relief for individuals during this time of uncertainty. Make sure to communicate with your workforce about this revised date. The IRS also maintains [this resource page](#) with additional information about tax filing and assistance surrounding COVID-19.

## 2 Mental Health Awareness Month

May has been designated Mental Health Awareness Month (or just “Mental Health Month”) in the United States since 1949. This annual observance calls attention to mental illnesses including the oft-overlooked or stigmatized conditions of depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and others—with 40 million American adults suffering from some form of anxiety disorder every year.<sup>1</sup> It aims to support those with mental illness and offer strategies for mental hygiene and wellness. Mental Health Awareness Month was in many cases pushed out of the headlines this year by coronavirus-related news. However, with many Americans facing uncertain futures and adjusting to new styles of work, it's more important than ever to properly address these issues.

**The 2020 theme for Mental Health Awareness Month is “Tools 2 Thrive.”**<sup>2</sup> The focus is on providing practical tools that are available to everyone to improve their own mental health and increase mental resiliency even in difficult situations. This theme was chosen before the COVID-19 pandemic was underway, but takes on even more importance during a time of crisis. Make sure to communicate frequently and openly with employees about every resource available to them to promote mental health, and take a look at our [on-demand webcast](#) for additional strategies employers can use to harness these tools.

## 3 Atlantic Hurricane Season

With a global health crisis demanding almost all of our attention, it's easy to feel as though we are as prepared for an emergency scenario as we've ever been. Unfortunately, seasonal weather systems are immune to stay-at-home orders—and experts are predicting that **2020's Atlantic hurricane season will be above average in terms of severity.**<sup>3</sup> The model created by the chief meteorologist for The Weather Company shows a potential 18 named storms, including nine hurricanes, four of which are likely to be Category 3 or higher.

It is imperative that companies at risk for disruption by these storms do not fall into the “out of sight, out of mind” trap as many remain fixated on pivoting or resuming operations due to the pandemic. With normal business continuity already disrupted for many organizations, now is the time to prepare and disseminate additional action plans in the event of a dangerous hurricane if your company operates within (or has employees working from) the at-risk zone. The National Hurricane Survival Initiative provides a simple [checklist for businesses](#) you can use to ensure that you have a way to speak directly to your entire workforce and check in on their safety.

## 4 Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute Fee

One of the provisions of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) mandates certain employers to pay an annual fee to the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI). Any employer that provided a self-insured health plan ending prior to October of last year must pay this fee by the upcoming deadline of **July 31, 2020**. This deadline has not been delayed or impacted by COVID-19.

Employers must report on their total number of applicable covered employees using [Form 720](#). The IRS set the fee (for plan years ending from Jan. 1, 2019 to Sept. 30, 2019) at **\$2.45 per plan enrollee**. According to the legislation, this is the last year the PCORI fee will be assessed, but it is important that employers do not let this deadline slip through the cracks as the IRS may assess penalties for late payment. Ensure that your HR team is prepared to accurately report on the entire workforce for compliance with this provision. For more information on what type of coverage is subject to the fee and how it should be calculated, see [this IRS resource](#).

### References:

1. <https://adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics>
2. <https://www.mhanational.org/mental-health-month>
3. <https://weather.com/storms/hurricane/news/2020-04-15-atlantic-hurricane-season-april-outlook-the-weather-company-ibm>



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# The Essential Summer Survival Guide for Parents:

## How to Work from Home with Kids During Summer 2020

School's out! Now what? Normally school ending signifies a 2-month break with children's days consisting of going to camp, playing outside, and maybe even a family vacation. However, this summer, things are looking very different. The country is beginning to reopen, but social distancing guidelines are still in place. So, as a working parent, what are you to do when your kids are no longer occupied with virtual learning?

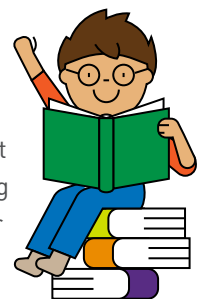
**Utilize local camps and babysitters.** As the country begins to reopen, there are still plenty of ways to keep the kids entertained and busy this summer. Check out summer camps open in your area. Camps have to follow strict guidelines and smaller cabin/class sizes. If you feel comfortable with their precautions, try sending your kids for a few hours a day. If you still don't feel ready to send your kids to camp, look into hiring a nanny/babysitter for a few hours a day or a few days a week. With school out, high school kids are looking for jobs and college students have most likely moved back in with their parents for the summer. Hiring a babysitter can help keep your kids entertained without being exposed to the public.

**Establish your own space.** When you have kids, you may have found that they've slowly taken over every part of your house. However, it's important to maintain your own area so you can have a place to go when you need to clear your head, work, or whatever else you may need. Create some kind of symbol, such as a light or hanging sign, so your kids know whether it's okay to interrupt you or not.



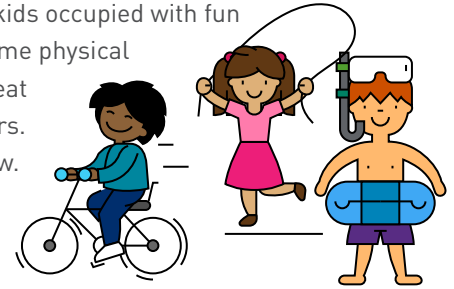
**Splitting the time not an option?** Whether you're a single parent, your partner is deployed, or whatever the reason may be, splitting the childcare may not be an option for you, meaning you're on-call 24/7. So, after three-plus months with no break, it's time to start looking at some other options. Hiring a part-time nanny or babysitter is a great first step in getting some alone time. While having help every single day may not be realistic, look into hiring a babysitter or nanny to watch your child(ren) for a few hours or one-two days a week. You'd be surprised just how refreshing it is to have a little bit of alone time. If childcare isn't an option, see if a cleaning service once a week is. Ticking just one task off your to-do list, while still limiting your public exposure, is a huge stress reliever.

**Keep up with learning.** School's out, but that doesn't mean the learning stops. With kids completing the last three months of the 2019-2020 year online, their skills might need some honing, or some slight encouragement to just retain what they learned. Consider Zoom tutoring—many teachers are offering virtual tutoring sessions to help their students over summer. If you're unsure of where to look, email your child's past teacher to see if they're tutoring or know of someone who is. If a (virtual) tutor isn't an option, look for learning activities you can do with your kids. One learning opportunity that they can complete independently is summer reading! We've found great resources for recommended reading curated by age group. If you have a child in elementary school or younger, check out these [recommendations](#) for books to read along with them, or [this selection](#) for stories featuring characters from diverse cultural backgrounds. If you have kids in middle school, check out [Scholastic's](#) must-read summer books. Plus, sites like [funbrain.com](#) offer fun learning activities for kids aged 1<sup>st</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade.



Another great learning opportunity for your kids is to open a dialogue with them on current events. Recently, CNN partnered with Sesame Street to talk about discrimination and racism in a way that's understandable to children of all ages. Check out the town hall [here](#).

**Need more activities?** With kids always on the move, it's important to keep a few activities on hand for rainy days or when you want to cut down on the TV time. Create an arts & crafts box with a new craft each week or every other week for kids to complete. Whether it's paper plate butterflies or writing and illustrating their own book, you can keep kids occupied with fun projects that spark their creativity and imagination. Another fun activity that incorporates some physical activity: day trips to local and national parks. Going on walks and hikes in new places is a great way to entertain kids (and tire them out) without having to come into close contact with others. They'll love an excuse to get out of the house, running around, and exploring somewhere new. Plus, [Disney Nature](#) has awesome kid-friendly content to explain the animal world.



While this is going to be a very different summer for everyone, taking advantage of these resources can help your kids have fun while you stay sane. For even more ideas, check out our blog on [working from home with kids](#). It's important to check your state's guidelines for reopening as they can be updated weekly or even daily.



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# Team Bonding from Afar

Keeping it together when you're apart.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many of us out of our offices and into our homes to reduce the risk of spreading this highly contagious disease. But social distancing from your colleagues doesn't have to mean emotional distancing. In fact, during uncertain times like these, it's even more important to build and maintain the bond among teammates when the distance can make it fragile. A study published in the *Academy of Management Journal* showed that economic downturns, such as the one we are currently experiencing, have a negative effect on employees' desire to help one another.<sup>1</sup> This hesitance can also jeopardize team bonding.

As a leader, you have a responsibility to ensure that your organization provides multiple platforms for team members to become closer and support each other. Team bonding leads to loyalty among coworkers which extends to your organization as a whole. When stay-at-home restrictions are in place—or if your team primarily works from home under normal circumstances—you may find it difficult to facilitate team bonding as the only way to do so is through digital means. Don't despair! There are several ways to encourage team bonding amid social distancing.

## Cultivate a Team-Oriented Culture

Culture is where it all starts. To build a team of people who are dedicated to the collective success first requires recruiting people with that mindset, people who share your organization's vision and values. Next, it's important to create an atmosphere which supports team bonding because this sets the tone for your employees. Instilling a **culture of belonging** in which workers feel like they are members of the team is crucial to helping them *want* to bond with their colleagues.

Executives must lay the foundation for creating a team-oriented culture by practicing this trait themselves and ensuring that managers have the resources they need to contribute to the cause. Managers and immediate coworkers have the most influence on the feeling of belonging that encourages team bonding so it's essential to provide opportunities for team bonding to occur from the top-down and then across.

## Open the Lines of (Online) Communication

It shouldn't come as a surprise that communication is a priority when you're trying to encourage team bonding. **Communication is the foundation for connectedness**, which is the glue that holds a team together. As you guide the communication effort, don't forget to include yourself; you have to lead by example and you are just as important a member of your team as your subordinates. They'll be looking to you to set the tone for the group.

The lack of physical presence means you can't walk around the office to check on your people and there's no water cooler or break room for them to chat about non-work-related happenings in their life. But you can create these opportunities using technology. Online video and chat forums such as Slack, Google Meet, Skype, and Zoom provide the means for everyone to keep in touch, whether it's about work or not. You can set up daily huddles to discuss work and/or weekly meetings for coffee meet-ups or happy hours, or in the case of Slack, set up channels dedicated to informal and work conversations. Video conferencing is an even better platform because it is more engaging and the next best thing to being there, enables greater communication, and supports connectedness and alignment.<sup>2</sup> It's essential because it enables human interaction patterns and face-to-face communication<sup>3</sup> that are absent from exchanges that are audio-based or typed.

## Get Active

Encourage bonding among your people by offering virtual activities in which they can participate individually or in teams. These activities pave the way for inter-organizational networking and socializing, and lets employees get to know each other beyond the professional level. Furthermore, such activities present the chance to celebrate each other, build team spirit, and just have some good old-fashioned fun. It's also good to host virtual challenges that can foster friendly competition; this type of activity can lead to healthy banter. Consider activities like:

- Fitness (mental and physical) classes
- Scavenger hunts
- Photo challenges
- Trivia games
- Charitable initiatives/drives
- Monthly birthday celebrations
- Lunch gatherings

We're not quite sure how long social distancing will last, but as long as it does, you need to keep your people engaged with each other by strengthening their bonds. These efforts will help your organization be proactive in any similar situations that arise. And even under normal circumstances, a significant portion of your workforce is likely to remain remote. Use these strategies to foster team bonding no matter what the future may hold.

References:

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