

Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Setting Boundaries to Avoid Video Call Burnout

Most people have probably clocked more hours on video calls during the COVID-19 pandemic than in the previous 10 years combined. What was once an occasional work conference call or FaceTime with a friend who's moved overseas is now the primary means of socializing as we deal with physical distancing restrictions. As a result, many are experiencing "Zoom burnout," with even the most enthusiastic extroverts feeling fatigued by daily video calls.

Here are some tips to prevent fatigue from constant video calling.

Setting boundaries with friends and family

While everyone is missing their friends and family, it can still be tricky to find the balance between contact and time to yourself. It can be hard to say no to an invitation when there's an expectation that everyone has more free time than usual right now. And though your close circle might be well-meaning in organizing regular quiz nights, drinks nights, brunches, games, and chats, it can leave you feeling pressured to say yes and lead to fatigue.

If all the staring at screens is getting to you, the best way to get yourself a break is to be honest about your energy levels and emotions. For example, a truthful but considerate response to a request might be:

- "I'm feeling like my eyes are going square—I need a rest from screens today! Can I get back to you?"
- "I'm a bit oversaturated with video chats right now. Can we try another time?"
- "I don't want to book too far in advance because my mood has been pretty up and down. Can I let you know closer to the time?"

It might also be helpful to consider how you spend these sessions—video conferencing can be draining and even a little intense. You might want to agree on an activity to do together, or have a voice call while you're doing something else, for example:

- exercising (especially if the other person is exercising too)
- cooking
- doing a puzzle
- cleaning the bathroom
- having a "watch party" where you sync up a film or TV show
- playing an online game
- book club

Having another activity to do can take the pressure off conversation, especially when many feel they don't have much news to share. Another alternative is to keep in touch in different ways. Sending texts, voice memos, cards, letters, and gifts can let people know you're thinking of them.

Setting boundaries at work

If you have a job that allows you to work from home, you might be experiencing work creeping into your life beyond your regular hours. This is a common situation for remote workers. To ensure a good work-life balance (and a good video/off video balance), consider the following:

Maintain standard work hours as much as possible.

If you're feeling like there are too many video calls in your team, suggest switching to voice calls. Ask if you can turn off your video, or query whether a meeting is definitely needed.

Say yes to the person but no to the task. If you're being asked to take on extra tasks, make sure you keep across your workload and what you can handle. If you're finding it too much, negotiate when requests come in. Find out what the person is asking of you and what they're looking for your help on particularly and help them access the resources they need ("What do you need specifically from the sales data? Lee is actually more familiar with that document than I am and might be better placed"), or add your own caveats ("I can do that but I won't have time until next week, is that OK?").

Remember that the time you would've spent commuting belongs to you rather than to your job. It's not extra time to put in a call to another time zone.

Book in leave. You might be tempted to save your days off for one large trip when you can travel again, but even a long weekend at home can leave you feeling refreshed.

Setting boundaries for yourself

Sometimes we don't say no when we should, or don't end a call even if we're tired. Here are some ways to ensure that you're taking care of yourself and avoiding screen burnout:

Set a limit for time spent on screens each day.

Plan for down-time in your calendar.

Try out hobbies that don't need screens. Reading print books, listening to a podcast, baking, embroidery, gardening, art, pickling vegetables, writing by hand, and yoga are all screen-free activities. Give them at try, and make time in your day to pursue what you enjoy.

Remember that variety is the spice of life—and it can be hard to find in the monotony of pandemic life. If you find yourself committing to regular events with the same group on a particular evening of the week, you may find you have less time to see other friends, to do your hobbies, or to do important life admin. Others in your networks might be feeling the same way, so don't be shy to decline an invitation and take a break. Someone else might be glad you did, too!

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