



# What is hybrid work?

## Background

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the child and youth mental health and addictions sector (the sector) faced tremendous changes in service delivery and workplace models. Attention was rapidly focused on virtual work and virtual care. Now, as we move into recovery planning, agencies are refocusing on hybrid work and service delivery models.

Through conversations with our sector partners, we at the Knowledge Institute have learned that each agency is taking their own approach to hybrid work and the meaning of hybrid may be different depending on the context. We developed this resource to summarize what the available literature and experts in the field say about hybrid work, its strengths and pitfalls, and unique considerations for hybrid models in the sector. This document serves as a primer to our other resources related to hybrid work.

## What is hybrid work?

Hybrid work is the combination of co-located (on-site) and remote (virtual) staff. Recent conceptualizations of hybrid work emphasize that we must consider how space, time and purpose intersect – in other words, who works where, when and why.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

In the post-pandemic workspace, hybrid has become a catch-all phrase<sup>2</sup> that can encompass any of the following configurations:

- a mix of employees always on-site and always remote
- scheduled on-site and remote work
- flexible on-site and remote work
- remote work with mandatory on-site meetings
- remote work with necessary activities on-site, such as in-person client sessions
- employees working in different geographic locations (satellite offices or at home) or at different times

Employers may specify where remote work can be done (home, work collectives, coffee shops) or allow employees to work anywhere. On-site work may be done in traditional assigned spaces such as offices or cubicles or using “hot desks” or shared workspaces.

In the context of community mental health and addictions, hybrid care can encompass the following configurations:

- in-person or on-site sessions with a practitioner supported by virtual, self-guided tools
- a mix of virtual and in-person sessions between client and practitioner
- blended treatment plans – for example, virtual intake with in-person follow-up
- virtual sessions with the client on site and the practitioner working remotely
- virtual sessions with the practitioner on site and the client accessing care remotely
- remote access to group sessions with a practitioner/facilitator on site
- in-person client work with all other work responsibilities completed virtually
- flexible work hours and workspaces

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Want to learn more about virtual care? Read these Knowledge Institute resources.



- [Transition to virtual care: An evaluation of changes to child and youth mental health service delivery in Ontario in response to COVID-19](#)
- [Supporting virtual teams and remote clinical supervision](#)
- [Virtual group therapy: Evidence summary for child and youth mental health service providers](#)
- [Quality guideline for virtual walk-in services](#)
- [E-mental health services](#)

## What are the benefits and challenges of hybrid work?

The pandemic has changed employees' priorities and perceptions of work. Many employees express a preference for hybrid work models to help achieve life balance and work flexibility.<sup>4,5,6,7,8</sup> In the knowledge industry<sup>i</sup>, the shift to remote work has been perceived as largely successful and highly productive.<sup>4,9,10,11,12,13</sup> However, not everyone in the sector has the same tasks and responsibilities and not everyone can do hybrid work. Hybrid functions well only for a select set of jobs.<sup>14</sup> This can lead to resentment among staff, especially in settings where in-person, site-specific work is necessary<sup>15</sup>, such as community mental health and addictions.

Some mental health practitioners have reported a renewed sense of work goals, boundaries and efficiencies since adopting remote work during the pandemic.<sup>16</sup>

The benefits of hybrid work are rooted in flexibility of space and time.<sup>1,2,3</sup> According to a variety of sources<sup>3,6,7,8,9,15,17,18</sup> benefits include:

- adaptable work hours
- streamlined processes
- systematic idea tracking and communication
- reduced commuting time
- increased opportunities to be physically active and connect with nature
- increased personal agency, autonomy and employee satisfaction
- increased access to a diverse talent pool

There are drawbacks to hybrid work. Hybrid mental health services can influence expectations related to response time. Service providers may feel obligated to be constantly available. This can lead to diminished work-life balance and well-being.<sup>7,17,19</sup> Although virtual work during the pandemic seemed to foster increased productivity, the well-being of many staff began to suffer, particularly among young staff, single staff, new employees and those caring for children.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Knowledge workers are those whose profession is based in complex thinking and the use or production of information such as scientists, analysts, programmers, researchers and writers. Importantly, knowledge workers are not required to do physical labour as part of their job.

According to a variety of sources<sup>3,7,8,9,10,17,18,21,23,24,25</sup> drawbacks of hybrid work include:

- presenteeism
- proximity bias<sup>ii</sup>
- real or perceived pressure to be “on” at all times and extended work hours
- lack of boundaries between work and home
- competing priorities
- reduced collaboration and innovation
- increased distraction
- feelings of isolation
- reduced socialization and social support
- screen and meeting fatigue
- technological issues
- perceptions of preferential treatment and unfairness

Hybrid work draws out asymmetries and power differentials between those working remotely and those on-site.<sup>9,22,23</sup> The different experiences of co-located and remote staff can cause two distinct organizational cultures to form, which can hurt employees’ identification with and sense of belonging to the whole team.<sup>3,22,25</sup> By emphasizing distinctions and differences among groups, hybrid models can also threaten to exacerbate gender, socioeconomic and racial inequities.<sup>10,11,23,26,27,28</sup>

## What’s unique about hybrid work in the sector?

In considering hybrid work in the child and youth mental health and addictions sector, we need to look at several aspects.

- The sector encompasses a combination of internal work between leaders and staff, and client-facing work between service providers and clients.
- Service providers’ schedules depend on client availability and may require working evening and weekend hours.
- Emergencies arise and client cancellations are common, presenting increased complexity.
- The benefits of hybrid work do not extend seamlessly into our sector; working from anywhere is not possible for work requiring confidentiality, crisis intervention and in-person care.<sup>30,31</sup>

The shift to hybrid work requires considering these aspects carefully and balancing individual needs of leaders, staff, families and young people with the collective responsibility to provide care.

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ii Proximity bias refers to leaders giving preferential treatment to the staff who are physically closest and most visible to them. For example, when on-site leaders can see on-site staff doing their work, they can easily assume these staff are the most productive and hardest working.<sup>9,22,29</sup>



**For more information and tips on leading high-performing teams in a hybrid workspace, check out these Knowledge Institute resources.**

- [How to lead teams in a hybrid workspace](#)
- [Building routines, rituals and resilience in a hybrid workspace](#)
- [Leading in a hybrid workspace: Moving our teams from surviving to thriving](#)

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