714 Disconnecting from Work Policy FAQs

Q: What does “disconnecting from work” mean?

A: The term “disconnecting from work” is defined in the *Employment Standards Act, 2000* to mean not engaging in work-related communications, including emails, telephone calls, video calls or sending or reviewing other messages, to be free from the performance of work.

Q: Under this new policy, is my supervisor allowed to contact me (call, email or text) outside of work hours?

A: The Disconnecting from Work policy is meant to reinforce respectful boundaries for contacting employees outside of working hours.

While employees are permitted to contact each other outside of regular work hours, the policy encourages everyone to be respectful of each other’s time away from work. The policy may be used to set expectations around situations when it is necessary to contact someone outside of work hours (e.g., an emergency) and when that contact can wait.

Instead of sending an email or making a call after hours when you happen to be thinking about a work topic, wait and reach out in the morning. Disconnecting from work is essential to work-life balance and mental health.

Q: As a faculty member, am I expected to respond to student emails that arrive in the evenings or on the weekend?

A: No. Students might reach out to you with questions when they are studying or working on assignments, but you are not expected to answer their messages outside of normal working hours.

Q: What happens if someone continues to expect me to work outside of my regularly scheduled hours?

A: If you find that colleagues or others in the University are preventing you from disconnecting outside of work, report your concerns or issues in writing to your immediate supervisor.

If you are concerned that your supervisor is not following the requirements in the policy, contact your HR consultant [1] or your FASR consultant [2].

Q: Am I allowed to contact my colleagues after hours?

A: The Disconnecting from Work policy is about respectful work-life boundaries. Before you send a message outside of work hours, consider whether it can wait.

Q: I tend to think about work projects after hours. How can I make sure I get those thoughts to my colleagues before I forget while still respecting their work hours?

A: Microsoft Outlook has a Delay Delivery option for email messages. Consider using it outside of working hours to have your message arrive when business hours resume.

Learn to delay delivery of email messages [3]in Outlook.

How do I manage my supervisor’s expectations around disconnecting from work?

A: The Disconnecting from Work policy reinforces a culture of boundaries. Speak with your supervisor about your

situation and requirements for being available outside of regular hours or responding during emergencies. Reinforce your own boundaries by responding after-hours only when necessary.

Q: Someone I don't report to regularly contacts me outside of work hours and expects a quick response. What should I do?

A: If the person is contacting you for something that is not an emergency, reinforce your own boundaries by responding during your regular work hours. If the individual continues to contact you outside of work hours, speak with your supervisor about expectations and for assistance managing the situation.

Q: Can my supervisor book meetings over the lunch hour?

A: Under the Disconnecting from Work policy, employees should do their best to respect one another's lunch and break times. If a meeting has to be booked over the lunch hour because of conflicting schedules, talk to your supervisor to ensure you still take your break, whether that is before the meeting or after.

Q: I have a flex-hours arrangement – I often work outside of standard hours or take my lunch break other than at noon. How does this policy apply to me?

A: The University's business hours are 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and most employees take a lunch break from noon to 1 p.m.

This policy applies to all those employed by the University. Speak with your supervisor to ensure you both understand the parameters of how this policy will apply to your work situation.

Outside of regular hours, your colleagues and supervisor may not be available to respond to you in a timely way.

Q: I have a pressing deadline/I am working on a time-sensitive major project that requires me to work outside of my regular working hours. How does this policy apply to me?

A: The Disconnecting from Work policy is meant to reinforce respectful boundaries for contacting employees outside of their regular working hours. While employees are permitted to contact each other outside of working hours, the policy encourages everyone to be respectful of each other's time away from work.

When working on a deadline or on a time-sensitive project, there may be times you need to work outside of regular hours. Make sure you talk with your supervisor in advance about the situation, how long those working conditions are expected to last and how your additional work will be recorded.

Q: My job fact sheet requires me to be on call for emergencies. How does this policy apply to me?

A: The Disconnecting from Work policy is meant to reinforce respectful boundaries for contacting employees outside of working hours. While employees are permitted to contact each other outside of working hours – and there may be an expectation to do so, particularly when an individual is on-call for emergencies – the policy encourages everyone to be respectful of each other's time away from work. Supervisors should ensure that no employee is on call at all times and that those who have on-call periods have an appropriate amount of time between on-call shifts.

Q: The University pays for my smartphone. Am I expected to answer calls on it outside of regular work hours?

A: Speak with your supervisor about expectations for availability outside of work hours.

Q: In light of this policy, will job fact sheets be re-evaluated?

A: No, job fact sheets will not be re-evaluated or changed as a result of this policy's implementation. Review of job fact sheets will follow current procedures and timelines.

Q: Will the University address workload demands that cause employees to stay connected outside of working hours?

A: The University strives to support work-life balance for all its employees. If you have concerns about your workload, please speak with your supervisor.

Supervisors

Q: Am I allowed to contact my employees after hours?

A: The Disconnecting from Work policy is meant to reinforce respectful boundaries for contacting employees outside of working hours. While employees/supervisors are permitted to contact each other outside of working hours, particularly for emergencies when an individual is on call, the policy encourages everyone to be respectful of each other's time away from work.

Before you send an after-hours email, consider whether the message can wait until regular hours.

If your team is working toward a deadline that requires additional work outside of regular hours, be clear with your team in advance about expectations, how long the requirement will last and how their extra time will be recorded. In such a scenario, be particularly mindful of when you are contacting employees and be sure to follow through on commitments to lieu time.

Be mindful of how employees interpret messages from you and what they may infer about your expectations. If you are sending a message at the end of the day on a Friday to clear something off your to-do list, your employees may interpret that as an expectation they respond over the weekend. If you don't require a response before Monday, make that clear in your message.

Q: Do supervisors and executives have the right to disconnect?

A: Yes, the Disconnecting from Work policy applies to every employee at the University of Guelph.

Q: I supervise an employee who works flex hours/I supervise faculty who do not regularly work within the University's standard hours. Do I have to be available to respond to that employee outside of my own work hours?

A: The Disconnecting from Work policy applies to every employee at the University of Guelph. You are encouraged to set expectations with those who report to you about when you will be available to them. Speak with your team to reach an understanding of availability. For instance, outside of an emergency, you may not be available before 8 a.m. or after 5 p.m.

The Disconnecting from Work policy is not one-size-fits-all. It is a universal principle that will have individual application.

Q: The nature of our work requires someone from my team to be on call 24/7. How does this policy apply?

A: In rare situations, a unit may require coverage 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In this situation, ensure that no one employee is expected to be on call at all times. Distribute accountability within your team. Make sure your employees clearly understand what qualifies as an emergency and what expectations are when they are on call.

Source URL:https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/714-disconnecting-work-policy-faqs

Links

[1] https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/find-your-hr-consultant-and-hr-service-associate [2] https://www.uoguelph.ca/facultyrelations/contact-us [3] https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/delay-or-schedule-sending-email-messages-026af69f-c287-490a-a72f-6c65793744ba