

# Conversation Guide

**RUOK?**<sup>TM</sup>

A conversation could change a life.

[ruok.org.au](http://ruok.org.au)

# You have what it takes to make a difference

In this guide you'll find tips to help you ask, 'are you OK?' and lend support to the people in your world any day of the year. Because when you genuinely ask, 'are you OK?' and are prepared to really listen to them share how they're feeling and what's going on in their life, you can help someone who might be struggling feel connected and supported, long before they're in crisis.

**A conversation could change a life.**



# Support is available

**If you are concerned for your safety or the safety of others, seek immediate assistance by calling Triple Zero (000)**

If you're finding life tough or need some extra support, it can help to talk about how you're feeling with someone you trust.

Family and friends can also call the services below for advice and assistance on how to support someone who is struggling with life.

## **Lifeline (24/7)**

13 11 14 | [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)

## **Beyond Blue (24/7)**

1300 224 636  
[beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au)

## **13 YARN (24/7)**

13 92 76 | [13yarn.org.au](http://13yarn.org.au)  
Support line for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

## **QLife (3pm-midnight)**

1800 184 527 | [qlife.org.au](http://qlife.org.au)  
Anonymous, free LGBTQ+ support

## **Kids Helpline (24/7, for ages 5-25)**

1800 55 1800 | [kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au)

## **Suicide Call Back Service (24/7)**

1300 659 467  
[suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

## **MensLine (24/7)**

1300 78 99 78 | [mensline.org.au](http://mensline.org.au)

## **1800RESPECT (24/7)**

1800 737 732  
[1800respect.org.au](http://1800respect.org.au)  
24/7 free counselling and support for people impacted by domestic, family or sexual violence.

Head to Health is a Federal Government platform that provides a directory of Australia's most trusted mental health organisations. Head to Health brings together apps, online programs, online forums and phone services, as well as a range of digital information resources.

You can call 1800 595 212 (Mon-Fri) or visit their website to talk to a mental health professional and be connected with the support that best meets your needs: [headtohealth.gov.au](http://headtohealth.gov.au)

**View contacts for national helplines and services at [ruok.org.au/findhelp](http://ruok.org.au/findhelp)**

## When you might need to ask, 'are you OK?'

The people in your world won't always tell you if something's troubling them, so it's important that you make asking, 'are you OK?' a part of your everyday relationships with friends, family, team mates and colleagues.

The earlier you provide an opportunity for someone to open up to you, the sooner they can find appropriate support or, if needed, seek professional help and the greater the chance that together, you can stop small problems from becoming bigger ones.

### Moments you might need to ask include times when:

- They're experiencing relationship difficulties or breaking up with a partner.
- They're experiencing increased levels of stress or constant stress.
- They're experiencing financial difficulty.
- They're going through a period of major change at work, home or in life.
- They have experienced the loss of someone or something they care about.
- They're facing a major health issue.



## You may also notice changes in what they're saying or doing



### WHAT ARE THEY SAYING?

**Look out for changes in what they're saying or expressing. They might:**

- Sound confused or irrational.
- Express they can't cope or feel out of control.
- Be more critical of themselves or others.
- Sound like they're trapped or in pain.
- Share feelings of loneliness or being a burden to others.

### WHAT ARE THEY DOING?

**Look out for changes in how they're behaving or what they're doing. You might notice:**

- They are lacking motivation or energy.
- They seem unable to 'switch off'.
- Changes in their sleeping, exercise or eating patterns.
- Them becoming more or less interested in their appearance.
- They've lost interest in something they used to enjoy.

# Preparing for the conversation



## Be ready

- Are you in a good headspace?
- Are you willing to genuinely listen?
- Have you set aside the time you might need?



## Be prepared

- Remember that you won't have all the answers (and that's OK).
- It can be difficult for people to talk about personal struggles and they might be emotional, embarrassed or upset.



## Pick your moment

- Have you chosen somewhere relatively private where you'll both be comfortable to chat?
- When is a good time for them to have a meaningful chat?
- If they don't have time when you first approach them, arrange another time for the conversation.
- It might be more comfortable for the person to be side-by-side with you (e.g., walking together or sitting in the car) rather than face-to-face.

# How to make a moment meaningful and ask R U OK?

Meaningful moments talking about life's ups and downs are more likely to happen when we're spending quality time together. So make asking, 'are you OK?' a part of these everyday interactions:

- On breaks from work or study.
- When you're doing an activity side-by-side.
- When exercising together.
- When you're sharing a meal.
- When connecting or doing activities together online.
- When you're travelling together, even a short trip can be a good time to talk.
- When you're spending time together socially.


It's better to ask than not to ask.

## It's none of my business


We all value our privacy and respect the privacy of others. You might be telling yourself, 'it's none of my business' or 'they won't want to talk to me about it anyway'. It's understandable to be unsure or a little embarrassed but it's better to start a conversation than to ignore that feeling you have that something is not quite right. Having someone show they care can make all the difference for someone who is feeling overwhelmed or distressed.

Remember though, even when you do make the first move, there's no guarantee they'll be ready to talk – but they'll know someone cares and next time you ask they might be ready.


# 4 steps of an R U OK? conversation

1  How are you travelling?


**Ask R U OK?**

2  I'm here to listen if you want to talk some more.

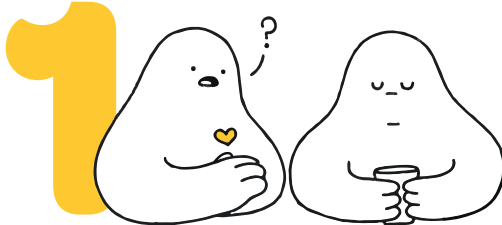
**Listen**

3  What have you done before that has helped?

**Encourage action**

4  Just wanted to check in and see how you're doing?

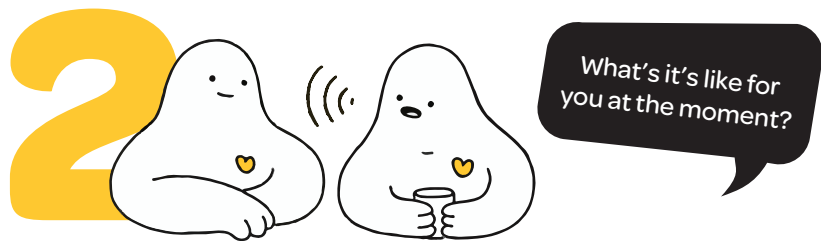
**Check in**

1  You don't seem yourself lately – want to talk about it?

## Ask R U OK?

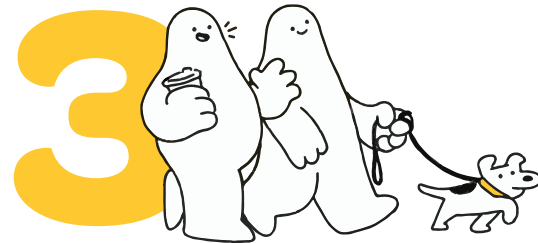
- Pick your moment. Start the conversation at a time and in a place where you'll both be comfortable.
- If they can't talk when you approach them, organise a time when they can.
- Be relaxed and friendly in your approach. Think about how you can ease into the conversation.
- If they don't want to talk, let them know you'll be there for them when they are ready, or ask if there's someone else they'd be more comfortable chatting to.





## Listen with an open mind

- Be prepared to listen. Don't try and solve their problems right away.
- Have an open mind.
- Don't rush them, or interrupt. Let them speak in their own time.
- Encourage them to explain.
- Show you've listened by repeating back what you have heard and asking if you have understood them correctly.



What can I do to help?

## Encourage action

- Once they've opened up, encourage them to do something that might lighten the load or, if appropriate, consider professional support.
- You don't have to have the answers or be able to solve their problems, but you can help them consider the next steps and actions they can take to manage their situation.
- Some good options might include talking to family, a trusted friend, their doctor or another appropriate health professional.
- You can also suggest they think about what's worked for them or helped when they've felt this way or faced similar challenges in the past.
- Things that help them relax or bring them joy might include going for a walk, seeing a movie, watching or playing some sport etc.



# 4



Have things improved or changed since we last spoke?

## Check in

- Remember to check in again soon to see how the person is doing. During the conversation, ask them to suggest a time that's good for them, "Do you mind if I drop by again soon to see how you're travelling?"
- Ask them how they're feeling and if they've found ways to better manage their situation.
- If they haven't done anything, be encouraging and remind them you're always there if they need a chat. Remember that for now they might just need someone to lend a listening ear.
- Understand that it can sometimes take a long time for someone to be ready to see a health professional. Try to reinforce the benefits of seeking professional help and suggest they try different avenues.
- If they've had a bad experience with a helpline or doctor, encourage them to keep trying. You could ask, "Would it be useful if we tried some other options to help you get through this?"
- Pop a reminder in your diary to drop in or call them in a couple of weeks. If they're really struggling, follow up with them sooner.
- Stay in touch and be there for them. Genuine care and concern can make a real difference.

## How to stay connected and show support

Maintain your relationship with them. They might be looking forward to the time they spend with you. You could:

- Lock in a regular catch up and one-on-one time.
- Ask them about activities they like to do and help them make plans to do them or offer to do them together.
- Arrange group activities to help them connect with others.





## Managing emotional reactions during a conversation

Sometimes during an R U OK? conversation the person might become emotional.

Here are some things you can do to make it a little less awkward and ease the pressure:

- Be prepared.
- Recognise their reaction might be in response to a range of circumstances - some of which you might not know about.
- Allow the person to fully express their emotions (i.e., let off steam) and reassure them by actively listening to all they say.
- Deal with the emotions first, you can discuss the issues more rationally once they are better able to explain what's going on.
- Being a good listener is one of the best things you can do for someone when they are distressed.
- Manage your own emotions by staying calm and not taking things personally.



# How do I deal with sadness?



Sad or tragic incidents are often difficult to deal with because we empathise with the person and feel helpless when we cannot take away their sadness or pain.

If someone begins to cry, sit quietly and allow them to cry. Lowering your eyes can minimise their discomfort. You could add, "I'm going to sit here with you and when you're ready we can keep talking".

If you anticipate this response, it can help to have tissues handy.

Use lots of empathetic phrases, such as, "It sounds like you're juggling a few things at the moment" or "I understand this must be challenging for you right now".

Make sure you're comfortable with any silence in the conversation. Know that silence gives them permission to keep talking and tell you more.

Encourage them to access appropriate support. That might include speaking to family, friends or a trusted health professional like their local doctor.

# How do I deal with anger? @#%!

If someone is expressing anger in answer to your question, you can respond with, "I can see this has upset you. Why don't you start at the beginning and tell me what I need to know".

Allow them to identify all the factors they feel are contributing to their anger.

You might encourage them by adding "I understand that (...) is a problem. What else is causing you concern?".

Be patient and prepared to listen to them talk about everything that's adding to their frustration.

To keep the conversation on track and to reassure them you're interested in all they have to say, try reflecting back what they have said. You could say, "So the thing that's really upsetting you is (...) Is that right?".

If they feel they have been wronged or treated unfairly you are unlikely to persuade them otherwise in this conversation. It's more constructive to listen to all they have to say and provide resources or, if appropriate, connect them with formal channels where their specific complaints can be heard.



# How do I deal with anxiety?

Speak in short, clear sentences while still showing concern and care.

If you anticipate an anxious response, use your preparation time to think about the right place and time for the conversation.

Stay calm. This is best displayed through deep, slow breathing, a lower tone of voice and evenly paced speech.



## Worried about their immediate safety?

**If you believe someone's life is in immediate danger call 000 (Australia only).**

If you think someone is having thoughts of suicide, don't be afraid to ask them if they are – asking the question does not lead to suicide.

Crisis helplines are there for you too. If you are finding the conversation difficult, call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or the Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467 who will provide immediate support and advice.

### How do I ask?

"People in situations like this may be thinking about suicide. Have you thought about taking your life?"

If they say yes, the most important things for you to do are to:

- 1. Keep them safe – do not leave them alone**
- 2. Get them immediate professional help.**

To keep them safe, remove any dangerous items from their physical location, particularly if they have mentioned a suicide plan.

If they share with you details of their plan, don't agree to keep these or their suicidal thoughts a secret.

Keep talking and listening to them. Be positive about the role professionals can play in helping them through tough times. You can say things like:

"I think it's time to link in with someone who can support you. I can help you to find the right person to talk to."

"You're not alone. We can figure this out together."

"Who's a person you trust? I would like to call them so we can both help."

**Getting them to professional help can start with any of these options:**



- Call a crisis support line together.
- Go with them to an emergency department.
- Take them somewhere that feels safe to them but where they won't be alone.

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