

# Staffroom

Conversation  Guide



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**RUOK?**<sup>TM</sup>  
A conversation could change a life.

## Why use this guide?

As a school staff member you may find yourself in a position where you are offering support to colleagues, students and families.

These conversations can sometimes be challenging and difficult to navigate, however this guide will help you build confidence and empower you as a help-giver so you can contribute to a culture that ensures all members of your school community feel safe and supported.

This practical conversation guide includes information on how and when to ask "Are you OK?" and also how to respond appropriately to anyone who says, "No. I'm not OK."

## What is an R U OK? culture

An R U OK? Culture is one built on mutual respect, trust, authenticity and a willingness to support those in your community who might be struggling.

Building that culture is a team effort and we can all play a role in encouraging R U OK? conversations between colleagues. To get started it's important each team member has the resources and information needed to boost their confidence and capacity to navigate potentially life changing conversations.

Whether you're an administrative staff member, department leader, classroom teacher or in a student support role, you can change lives.

The principles listed below are your guide to the values and behaviours to create an R U OK? culture in your staffroom.

- 01 Students feel supported by their teachers and peers
- 02 Staff, students and families are respectful of and show kindness towards each other
- 03 School is a positive and enjoyable experience for all involved
- 04 The staffroom is a team environment founded on mutual respect and positive relationships
- 05 Staff establish and maintain a physically and emotionally safe environment
- 06 All members of the school community are able to spot the signs someone they know might be struggling and are confident and willing to start a meaningful R U OK? conversation to support them



# The signs it might be time to start an R U OK? conversation

It won't always be obvious when someone's not OK, but these are changes you can look out for that might signal they need some extra support.

## WHAT ARE THEY SAYING?

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

- Sound confused or irrational
- Be moody
- Be unable to switch off
- Be concerned about the future
- Be lonely
- Be lacking in self-esteem

## WHAT ARE THEY DOING?

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

- Experiencing mood swings
- Dismissive or defensive
- Self-medicating
- Becoming withdrawn
- Not contributing in staff meetings as they usually would
- Changing their online behaviour
- Losing interest in things they used to love
- Less interested in their appearance and personal hygiene
- Changing their sleep patterns
- Changing their appearance

## WHAT'S GOING ON IN THEIR LIFE?

**Is there something going on in their life? Have they experienced:**

- A traumatic incident
- A change in work circumstances or job responsibilities
- Pressure due to work expectations
- Increased pressure from relocation or changed living arrangements
- Conflict at work or at home
- Relationship issues
- Major health issues or an injury
- Constant stress
- Financial difficulty
- Loss of someone or something they care about

**If you've noticed a change, no matter how small, trust your gut instinct and ask R U OK?**



# How to have an R U OK? conversation



## 1. Ask R U OK?

- Are you in a good headspace?
- Can you give them as much time as needed?
- Have you chosen somewhere relatively private where you'll both be comfortable?
- Ask the person if they are free to have a chat
- Tell them the changes you've noticed in their behaviour as a way to help them open up to you.

I've noticed you're a bit out of sorts and not as organised as you normally would be. Is everything OK for you?

I'm worried as you haven't been as chatty lately. Would you like to talk about what's going on?



## 2. Listen with an open mind

- Listen without judgment
- Active listening means giving your full attention, resist the urge to 'fix' the problem or offer solutions
- Reflect back what they've told you, this helps the person feel heard
- Let them know you're asking because you're concerned about them
- If they become angry or upset, stay calm and don't take it personally
- You might need to ask more than once before they feel comfortable sharing.

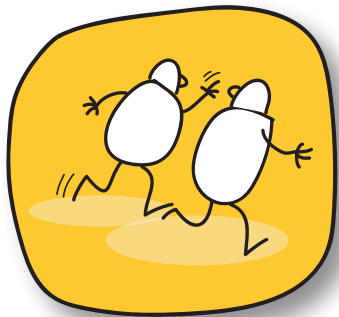
That sounds pretty rough, have you been feeling like this for a while?

What's that like for you?

Thank you for telling me, it sounds like you are upset because...







### 3. Encourage action

If they are not OK:

- Encourage them to talk to a supportive person. This could be a family member, elder, friend, trusted health professional or a support person or service available at school
- Come up with a plan together, ask them what they would like to do (sometimes, talking through options can help you determine the most appropriate support option for them)
- Stay with them and together take action to access support. This might be a call to a support service, making an appointment with a doctor or organising other professional support.

#### Handy tip:

Help is always available. As the help giver, you can also call a support service for advice on what to do next if someone is not OK

I've got some numbers that might help. Would you like to make a call together?

Want to look into some help options together?

Would you like me to chat to them with you?

I've been thinking about you and am wondering how you've been since we spoke last week?

How'd you go speaking to your family?



### 4. Check In

- It's important to check in again soon to see how they're doing
- If they haven't done anything, keep encouraging them to seek support, and remind them you're always there for a chat
- Understand that sometimes it can take a while for them to accept they might need professional help, so it's important to be patient and continue to be a supportive person.







## What if they say if I'm fine?

- If you feel that's not the case, ask again. You could say, "you don't seem like yourself lately"
- Acknowledge they might not be ready to talk
- Tell them you're still concerned about changes in their behaviour and you care about them and are there to support them
- Ask if you can check in with them again next week if you're still concerned
- Reach out to someone else who is close to that person to ask if they have noticed any changes and whether they have concerns. You can encourage them to also check in.

**It's important to remember that it can take time for someone to open up about things they are struggling with. You may need to ask 'Are you OK' a few times before they feel comfortable talking.**



## Support Services

**If you or someone else is in danger, call 000 immediately.**

If someone you know is not OK, support is available from the following organisations: (remember you can always call these free services for support and advice on what to do next).

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

13 11 14

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

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

1300 659 467

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

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

1300 224 636

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

### **Kids Helpline**

**(24/7, for youth 5-25)**

1800 55 1800

[kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au)

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

1300 78 99 78

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

### **More resources:**

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



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