

# R U OK? Day Awareness

## 9 September 2021

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It is not news to anyone that we are currently facing challenging times, we all know it and experience it. That is why it is more critical than ever that we have strong social connections and support networks around us.

This Thursday 9 September is R U OK? Day, and this year's message is ***Are they really OK? Ask them today.*** We all face various trials and tribulations throughout our lives. It is highly likely that you know someone who might be struggling with something, but do you actually know when these people are struggling?



Someone may appear to be doing ok on the surface, but their actions may show otherwise. Starting a meaningful conversation and providing your genuine support can make a huge difference to someone, helping them to address all kinds of challenges that they may encounter in their life. And, it works even better if you provide your support before that someone becomes visibly distressed or overwhelmed by the crisis they are facing.

### About R U OK?

R U OK? is an Australian-based harm prevention charity whose purpose is to encourage people to meaningfully connect and provide appropriate support to the people in their lives who might be struggling through the simple act of having a conversation. Their vision is to see that people are connected, have a sense of belonging and are protected from suicide through the being supported by the people around them (R U OK?, 2021).

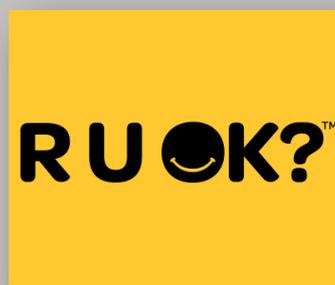
On their website, [R U OK?](https://ruok.org.au) has a wide range of free resources and information designed to help all Australians recognise the signs of a person who is struggling, and provide them with the tools to start a conversation with them and lend support. I encourage you to check it out:

- [R U OK? resources you can use every day](#)
- [How to ask R U OK?](#)
- [R U OK Conversation Guide](#)
- [About the R U OK? organisation](#)
- Join the [RUOK? Day webinar](#)

This insight will briefly explore this year's R U OK? Day message and the importance of being aware of how you could lend support to others through a conversation.



### R U OK? DAY



**R U OK? Day is the national day of action on the second Thursday of September (9 September 2021), and is dedicated to reminding people to regularly check in with family, friends, colleagues and neighbours.**



## Why is a conversation important?

We often underestimate the value of a good conversation. A conversation is one simple way we can connect with others, and a method of checking whether someone is doing ok or not. Meaningful conversations with our co-workers, friends and family fosters a sense of belonging and social connectedness for all those involved. When people feel like they belong, they will be more comfortable with reaching out for help when they encounter struggles.

The community plays an important role in the prevention of suicide and other mental health issues. There is existing evidence that proves that social connectedness and support has a critical role in protecting at-risk individuals. Individuals that are experiencing suicidal thoughts often will not actively seek help, and if they do, they are more likely to approach friends or family rather than mental health professionals (Mok, et al., 2016). Therefore, knowing how to have a meaningful conversation can change someone's life, and potentially even encourage at-risk individuals to seek professional help.



## How to ask R U OK?

For many of us, the thought of starting a conversation with the aim of asking 'Are you okay' is incredibly daunting. Additionally, knowing what to say when someone tells you they are NOT OK can also be intimidating. However, R U OK? has developed some simple tools and tips to help us start and hold a meaningful conversation and provide appropriate support to those who need it:

### Before you Ask

Before asking others, you must check in with yourself. Are you mentally prepared to ask, listen and provide advice in the event that someone confesses that they are not ok? Have you picked the right moment to have a genuine conversation with the other person?

R U OK? has a couple of questions you can ask yourself in preparation:



#### AM I READY?

- Am I in a good headspace?
- Am I willing to genuinely listen?
- Can I give as much time as needed?



#### AM I PREPARED?

- Do I understand that if I ask how someone's going, the answer could be: "No, I'm not"?
- Do I understand that you can't 'fix' someone's problems?
- Do I accept that they might not be ready to talk? Or they might not want to talk to me?



#### PICKED MY MOMENT?

- Have I chosen somewhere relatively private and comfy?
- Have I figured out a time that will be good for them to chat?
- Have I made sure I have enough time to chat properly?

Source: [R U OK? Website](#)

If you are not ready that's ok. Remember, even if you are not able to personally have the R U OK? conversation with someone you think is struggling, you can always approach another person in their support network and ask them to lend their support instead.





### Step 1: Asking

If you think you recognise some signs that someone may be struggling and not behaving as they usually would, trust your gut instinct and act on it. Asking R U OK? is about showing your concern in a relaxed and friendly manner. Let them know that you have noticed that something about their actions or behaviour has made you concerned for them, and ask them how they are going.

Value privacy and avoid confrontation – if they do not want to talk do not criticise, instead offer your concern and let them know you are available to chat if they want.

### Step 2: Listening

If they are willing to share their concerns with you listen with genuine interest and an open mind. The conversation should not be rushed, and silence allows for time to think. Show that you have listened carefully and acknowledge their struggles by repeating (in your own words) what they have told you. Do not be afraid to seek clarification or encourage them to explain their thoughts.

### Step 3: Encouraging Action

Encouraging positive action to help them through their struggles is the next step. Ask them if there is anything they have done previously that may help, or is there something enjoyable/relaxing they can do right now to help improve their mindset. Offer your support, and if relevant share your past experiences with a tough time and how you dealt with it.

Acknowledge when a problem may be too big for you to take on alone. There are a wide variety of expert support contacts and networks that can be referred to. Encourage them to seek them out for expert help if they have been feeling really down for longer than two weeks (you can offer to assist them with finding the right person to talk to), there is no judgement for seeking help.

### Step 4: Checking In

Show your continued support by checking in with the person after your conversation to see how they are going. Ask them if they have found a way to manage the situation that they were struggling with, and do not judge them if they haven't, instead offer your continued support.

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### In conclusion

It isn't always easy to ask if someone is ok, but it has the potential to change their life if you do. That is why awareness of the R U OK? campaign, with its vast collection of helpful resources, can help you prepare for a conversation that could change a life.

### Support

Contact [Lifeline](#) on 13 11 14 for crisis support. If life is in danger, call 000.

While R U OK? is not a crisis support, counselling service or its resources a substitute for professional care, they have a number of [CONTACTS](#) where you can reach out for support listed on their website.

### References

- Mok, K., Donovan, R., Hocking, B., Maher, B., Lewis, R., & Pirkis, J. (2016). Stimulating community action for suicide prevention: findings on the effectiveness of the Australian R U OK? Campaign. *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion*, 18:4, 213-221.
- R U OK? (2021, August). *A conversation could change a life | R U OK?* Retrieved from R U OK?: <https://www.ruok.org.au/>

