



A guide to
asking **RUOK?**

ruok.org.au

RUOK?[™]

A conversation could change a life.



This resource contains tips to help you know when and how to have a conversation with someone who may be lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender, intersex, queer (LGBTIQ+), and other sexuality, gender and bodily diverse people including First Nations brotherboys and sistergirls. When we use 'LGBTIQ+' we are also talking more broadly about people with diverse bodies, sexualities and genders.

The contents of this booklet have been developed in consultation with LGBTIQ+ Health Australia.

How conversations can make a difference

Life can be challenging, and we all need support during times of stress, grief, loss, relationship breakdown and when we're under work or financial pressure. For LGBTIQ+ people, they may also experience instances of prejudice, stigma, and discrimination that others do not. Some of these may include:

- Homophobic, biphobic, transphobic, and/or intersexphobic attitudes in others
- Pressure to conform to heterosexual or cisgender standards and in some cases active attempts to 'convert' them out of their identity status
- Trauma and psychological distress as a result of involuntary or coerced medical interventions
- Bullying and intimidation in the workplace or at school
- Rejection from family and friends
- Stress that builds up over time due to feeling different or from being 'on your guard' all the time.
- Acts of public aggression and/or violence in the home based on their sexual orientation or gender identity
- Rejection from places of worship or exclusion from other community groups (such as sporting teams)

The support of friends, family, peers and allies can make a difference when someone is dealing with challenges like these and life's ups and downs. A simple way to provide support is by starting an R U OK? conversation.

This guide contains tips to help you feel confident you can have a conversation with someone you're worried about.

Brotherboys, sistergirls and other LGBT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience a number of significant and intersecting points of discrimination and marginalisation. Visit ruok.org.au/strongertogether for additional resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.



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

It won't always be obvious when someone's not doing so well but these are changes you can look out for that might signal they need a bit of extra support.

WHAT ARE THEY SAYING?

Do they sound:

- Confused or irrational
- Moody
- Unable to switch off
- Concerned about the future
- Concerned they're a burden
- Lacking self-esteem
- Concerned they're trapped or in pain
- Like they feel their friends and family aren't supportive
- Like they feel lonely, don't belong or that they don't fit in
- Like they're struggling to find their tribe or community





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

WHAT ARE THEY

DOING

Are they:

- Experiencing confusion about their identity
- Experiencing mood swings
- Self-medicating or self-harming
- Engaging in risk taking behaviours
- Unable to concentrate
- Losing interest in what they used to love
- Less interested in their appearance and personal hygiene
- Changing their sleep patterns

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THEIR

LIFE

Have they experienced:

- Violence, trauma or harassment
- Injury or illness
- A major change
- Have they recently 'come out' or are considering it
- Relationship issues
- Constant stress
- Financial difficulty
- Loss of or alienation from someone or something they care about



"We need to not only be able to ask are you OK? but also feel like there are people we can tell when we're not OK."

Steven

Getting ready to start an R U OK? conversation



Be ready

- Are you in a good headspace?
- Are you willing to genuinely listen?
- Can you give as much time as needed?
- Are you the best person to have the conversation or is there someone else in their support network that you should encourage to reach out to them?



Be prepared

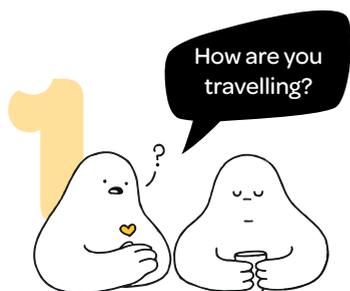
- Remember you won't have all the answers (which is OK)
- Listening is one of the most important things you can do
- If someone is talking about personal struggles it can be difficult and they might become emotional, defensive, embarrassed or upset
- Have you considered how past experiences could affect their reaction in the conversation? E.g they may not want to talk about it or they may have concerns with trust
- Have you researched what appropriate support is available for the person you're talking to?
- Have you thought about the language you're using? You can find tips and information on language at www.lgbtiqhealth.org.au/inclusive_language_guide



Pick your moment

- Have you chosen somewhere relatively private and informal where they'll feel safe?
- What time will be good for them to chat? Ideally try and put aside 30 minutes so the conversation isn't rushed
- If they can't talk when you approach them, suggest another time to have the conversation
- Consider whether it might be more comfortable for the person to talk to you online or side-by-side with you e.g. walking together rather than face-to-face

4 steps to an R U OK? conversation:



Ask R U OK?

- Be relaxed
- Help them open up by asking questions like “How are you going?”, “What’s been happening?” or “I’ve noticed that you’re not quite yourself lately. How are you travelling?”
- Make an observation. Mention specific things that have made you concerned about them, like “I’ve noticed that you seem really tired recently” or “I’ve noticed you saying you don’t feel supported. How are you going?”
- If they don’t want to talk, let them know that you care and that you’re available whenever they need a listening ear. You could say, “I’m always here but is there someone else you’d be comfortable talking to?”

“We need to create spaces for people to tell their story and their experience quite openly and broadly, without judgement.”

Jacinta



“Their support
has helped me love
myself and be proud
of who I am.”

Elvis



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

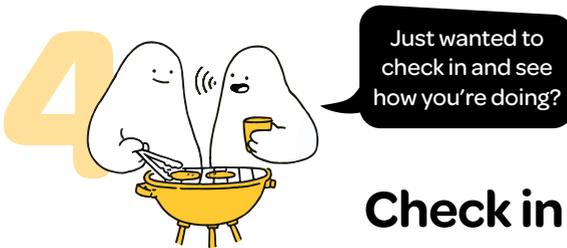
Listen with an open mind

- Emphasise that you're here to listen not judge
- Take what they say seriously
- Don't interrupt or rush the conversation
- If they need time to think, try and sit patiently with the silence
- Encourage them to explain what's going on: "Have you been feeling this way for a while?", "It sounds like that would be really tough. How are you going with managing it?", "So, what was that like?" or "What's been happening?"
- Don't make assumptions or apply unprompted labels or conclusions about their identity
- If they get angry or upset, stay calm and don't take it personally
- Let them know you're asking because you're concerned about them



Encourage action

- Ask: "Where do you think we can go from here?"
- Ask: "What would be a good first step we can take?"
- Ask: "What do you need from me? How can I help?"
- You could ask, "Do you think it would be useful if we look into finding some professional or other support?"
- Good options for action might include talking to family, a trusted friend, an appropriate health professional or LGBTIQ+ services, like QLife



Check in

- Remember to check in and see how the person is doing in a few days' time
- Ask how they're coping with the situation or feelings and if they need support to manage it
- If they haven't done anything, keep encouraging them and remind them you're always here if they need a chat
- Understand that sometimes it can take a long time for someone to be ready to see a professional for support
- Try to reinforce the benefits of seeking professional help and trying different avenues



“She made me realise that someone did understand and that someone did care. Because of her I got help and recovered.”

Jane

Useful contacts for someone who's not OK

Encourage them to call on a trusted health professional or these Australian crisis lines and professionals:

QLife (3pm-midnight)

1800 184 527

qlife.org.au

Lifeline

13 11 14

lifeline.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service (24/7)

1300 659 467

suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Beyond Blue (24/7)

1300 224 636

beyondblue.org.au

SANE Australia:

1800 18 SANE (7263)

sane.org

More contacts:

ruok.org.au/findhelp

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R U OK? celebrates the strength, resilience and diversity of lesbian, gay, bi, trans, intersex, queer, and other sexuality, gender and bodily diverse people and communities.