

Title: Former NRL player Brett Finch on why workmates need to talk

R U OK? Ambassador Brett Finch knows first-hand the difference a genuine conversation can make when someone is going through tough times. Retiring from NRL three years ago, Finch landed on his feet working for Channel 9's much loved, The Footy Show.

Life should have been sweet given the transition out of professional league and back in to the workforce can be hard for many players. But Finch admits that he struggled with the loss of football.

“I played professional rugby league for fifteen years. I'd always wanted to be a rugby league player and I really thought I was going to play forever. I'd never planned for anything after football.

“When I retired, I struggled. I lost a lot of motivation, I felt like I'd lost a part of my identity and I didn't talk about it. I had a lot of issues that really built up.

“I felt I had nothing to complain about - I had a good job, I earned good money, financially everything was alright - but on the inside, it wasn't. I tried to fix these problems on my own, and I didn't talk, I didn't reach out for help and the problems grew and I really battled for a while.”

The decision to be honest and to reach out for support was one of the hardest things Brett had ever done. But he tells us it's also one of the most rewarding.

“I wish I had spoken up so much sooner, my problems got worse because I didn't. When I finally sought help, the support I got from friends, family and people on the street, was enormous.”

“The biggest turnaround, if I could pinpoint one thing, is my ability now to talk about how I feel. I'm certainly not great at it and it's not something I'm always comfortable doing but when I talk things out I find those small problems don't become big problems because I get on them straight away.

“My fiancée Elli's been a major help with that – understanding where I'm at and pushing me to talk.”

This support encouraged Finch to become an R U OK? Ambassador. He wanted to be a voice to help other people understand that things can get better by letting yourself be *vulnerable* and open up to mates and loved ones.

The logo for RUOK? is displayed in a yellow speech bubble. The text "RUOK?" is in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letter "O" is replaced by a black circle with a white smiley face inside. A small "TM" trademark symbol is located to the upper right of the question mark.

A conversation could change a life.

“Knowing how I’ve struggled, I thought being an R U OK? Ambassador was the perfect fit. If I could see the same thing going on with someone else, to be able to talk with them and check in and see if they’re ok? it’s something I wanted to be part of,” he said.

This year, Brett Finch is proud to be stepping up as the Ambassador for the rail industry’s third Rail R U OK?Day.

“I’m honoured to be part of this year’s Rail R U OK?Day. I’ve got so much respect for rail workers and the traumas they endure on their job are truly shocking. My father-in-law works on the rails and I know first-hand the life-changing experiences he goes through and the impact it has not just on himself but also his family.

“It’s really important that rail workers don’t keep what they’re going through inside and they have the support from their co-workers and mates to get through these difficulties.

“By taking it upon yourself to go up and ask your workmates if they’re doing alright, if they seem a bit off or they’re not talking as much, it could make all the difference,” he says.

Brett believes that everyone’s got what it takes to support a workmate who may be struggling with life.

“The big thing I’ve found from R U OK? is the 4 steps: 1 - ask if they’re ok, 2- listen to what they have to say, 3 - encourage them to get some help and then 4 - check in on your mate. I found that really important for me. And I found those simple steps can help break down those barriers with my friends.”

Visit ruok.org.au for more tips on starting a conversation with a workmate you’re worried about.

Do you work in the rail industry? Get involved in **Rail R U OK?Day** on Thursday 20 April - a campaign developed by R U OK? in collaboration with **TrackSAFE**. Find out how **here**.

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