

# HOW TO ASK R U OK?

A practical guide for the the rail industry

Ask “are you  
really OK?” any  
day of the year

I’m here  
to listen

Keep the  
conversations   
on  
track 

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

TrackSAFE  
Foundation

R U OK?™

This booklet contains tips to help you start an R U OK? conversation, not just on **Rail R U OK?Day** but any day you notice someone might be struggling.

## This year we're celebrating our 8<sup>th</sup> Rail R U OK?Day

Over the years, **Rail R UOK?Day** has helped tens of thousands of people in the rail industry to establish a deeper connection with their colleagues by asking R U OK? and beyond the day itself, feeling confident to have an ongoing conversation. This practical guide has been developed to help you have those conversations.

For some, the stigma about discussing mental health can be a barrier to seeking help – which is why workmates looking out for behaviour changes and encouraging ongoing conversations about how things are going is so important. Talking about mental health – just like our physical health, is key to changing attitudes and people's actions.

As a result of **Rail R UOK? Day**, our evaluation results have shown that people in the industry are:

- More willing to ask a workmate what's troubling them.
- More willing to tell a workmate what's troubling them if asked.
- More willing to seek professional help for something that is troubling them.

In addition to following the practical steps within this guide, we encourage all those in management positions to consider additional training, such as Mental Health First Aid – to further enhance your ability to support staff.

On behalf of the TrackSAFE Foundation, thank you for your ongoing support.



Yours sincerely,

**Danny Broad**

TrackSAFE Foundation Chair



## What's in the guide?

### Simple, practical tools to help you:

- Know when to ask R U OK? 6
- Prepare for an R U OK? conversation 8
- Have an R U OK? conversation 11
- Support a team member who is struggling 16
- How to manage emotional reactions to a conversation 17
- Useful contacts and support services 23

# How meaningful conversations can make a difference

## Do you know how the people in your world are really going?

Life's ups and downs happen to all of us.

So, stay connected and keep the conversation on track to make asking "are you OK?" a part of your everyday. In this guide you'll find tips to help you ask "are you OK?" and lend support to the people in your world every day of the year.

Because when we genuinely ask, "are you OK?" and are prepared to talk with your workmates about how they're feeling and what's going on in their life, we can help someone who might be struggling feel connected and supported, long before they're in crisis.

**Are they really OK? Ask them today. A conversation could change a life.**



# When might I 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 teammates 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. Together, you can stop small problems from becoming bigger ones.

## Moments you might need to ask include:

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

It sounds like you're going through a challenging time. Can you tell me about what's going on?

Have you been feeling this way for a while?



## 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’.

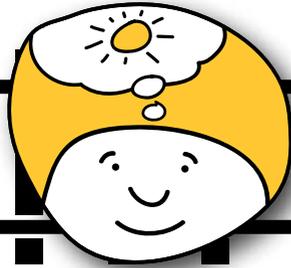
It's understandable to be unsure or a little nervous but it's better to start a conversation than to ignore that feeling you have that something is not quite right.

Having someone show they care can make a big difference to 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.**

# Gearing up to have an R U OK? conversation

If you think someone you know might be struggling with life, then it's time to trust your instinct and ask 'are you OK?'. The below steps will help you prepare for the conversation.



## Ask yourself

- 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? If not, is there someone else in their support network you can encourage to reach out to them?

## Be prepared

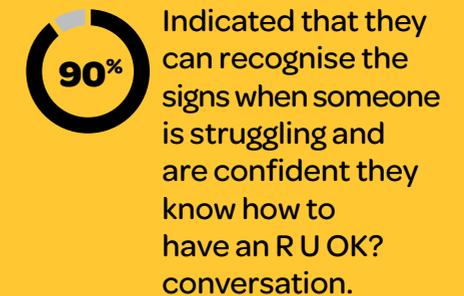
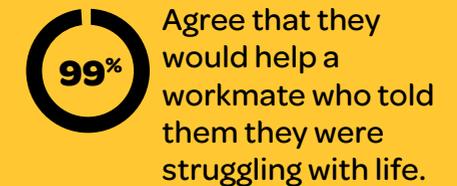
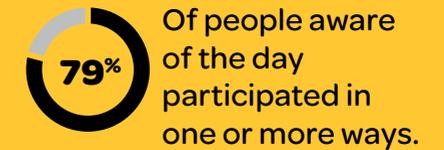
- Remember you won't have all the answers (and that's OK).
- Listening is one of the most important things you can do.
- If someone is talking about personal struggles it can be difficult and they might become emotional, defensive, embarrassed or upset.
- Have you researched what appropriate support is available for the person you're talking to?

## Pick your moment

- Have you chosen somewhere relatively private and informal where they'll feel comfortable?
- You don't want to rush the conversation so make sure you both have enough time.
- If they can't talk when you approach them, try to confirm another time to have a conversation.
- Consider whether the person might prefer to be to be side-by-side with you e.g. walking together, rather than face-to-face.

## Rail R U OK? Day Impact

A 2021 evaluation of **Rail R U OK? Day** revealed a positive impact on those who participate. Of those surveyed:



# When to ask R U OK?

It won't always be obvious when someone's not doing so well but these are signs and 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 lonely, don't belong or that they don't fit in

## WHAT ARE THEY

### DOING?

#### Are they:

- Experiencing mood swings
- Dismissive or defensive
- 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:

- Injury or illness
- Relationship issues
- Constant stress
- Financial difficulty
- A period of major change
- A traumatic or distressing incident

If you have noticed two or more of any of these in a colleague, that person might need some extra support.

**It's time for you to start a conversation.**

## The 4 steps to an R U OK? Conversation

### 1. Ask R U OK?



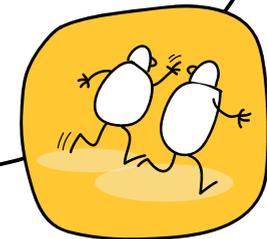
### 4. Check in



### 2. Listen with an open mind



### 3. Encourage action





## 1. Ask RU 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, arrange a better time with them.
- 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 always be ready for them when they are or ask if there's someone else they'd be more comfortable chatting to.
- Help them open up by asking questions like "How are you going?" or "What's been happening?" or "I've noticed you've not quite been yourself lately. How are you travelling?"
- Mention specific things that have made you concerned for them like, "I've noticed that you seem really tired recently" or "You seem less chatty than usual"

**I've noticed you've not quite been yourself lately. How are you travelling?"**

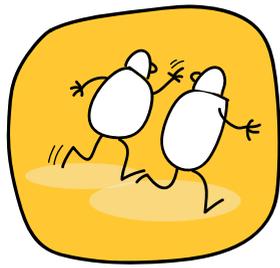
## What if they don't want to talk to me?

- Try not to take it personally if they don't want to talk. They might not be ready to talk or they might need more time to realise that you genuinely care.
- Respect their decision not to talk. Don't pressure or criticise them or try to force them to talk.
- Focus on something you think they might be comfortable talking about like, "I know you've had trouble sleeping and concentrating lately. Can we talk about that?" Suggest they talk to someone they trust, such as a family member or friend. You could say, "I'm always here if you ever want to chat but is there someone else you'd rather talk to?"
- Ask if you can check in with them again soon.
- Remember, the act of reaching out to them might encourage them to reflect on how they're doing and prompt them to talk.



## 2. Listen with an open mind

- Be prepared to listen. Don't try and solve their problems right away.
- If they need time to think, try to sit patiently with the silence.
- Have an open mind.
- Don't rush them, or interrupt. Let them speak in their own time.
- If they get angry or upset, stay calm and don't take it personally.
- Encourage them to explain.
- Show you've listened by repeating back what you have heard and asking if you have understood them correctly.



### 3. Encourage action

- Once they've opened up, encourage them to access support or to do something that might lighten the load.
- You don't have to have the answers or be able to offer professional health advice, 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 in the past when they've felt this way or faced similar challenges.
- Things that help them relax or bring them joy might include going for a walk, seeing a movie, watching or playing some sport etc.
- Ask: "where do you think we can go from here?" or "What do you need from me? How can I help?"

**What would be a good first step we can take?**

**Should we sit together and make an appointment with your Doctor?"**



### 4. 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 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 the relationship that you have 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 catch-ups you help them connect with others.



What do you need from me?  
How can I help?

## 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 things a little less awkward and ease the pressure:

- Be prepared.
- 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.
- 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 their emotions are managed.

Shall we look into some help options together?

## 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.

# What if they say 'I'm fine' but you're still concerned?

- Ask again. You could say, "It's just that you don't seem yourself lately."
- If they deny they have a problem, don't criticise them. Acknowledge they're not ready to talk.
- Avoid a confrontation.
- Examples of how you could respond to their denial include "It's OK that you don't want to talk about it but please call me when you're ready to chat" or "Is there someone else you'd rather talk to?"
- Tell them you're still concerned about changes in their behaviour and you care about them.
- Ask if you can check in with them again next week if you're still concerned.
- If you're worried about them, reach out to someone else who is close to that person to see if they have noticed the changes you have or whether they have concerns. You can encourage them to also check in.



What do you need from me?  
How can I help?

Shall we look into some help options together?

# Worried about their immediate safety?

If you believe their 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 Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467 who will provide immediate support and advice.

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.

# Useful contacts for someone who's not OK

Encourage them to call on these Australian crisis lines and professionals:

## Lifeline (24/7)

13 11 14

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

## SANE Australia:

1800 187 263

[sane.org](http://sane.org)

## Suicide Call Back Service (24/7)

1300 659 467

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

**Mensline** (support over the phone or online for men)

1300 78 99 78

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

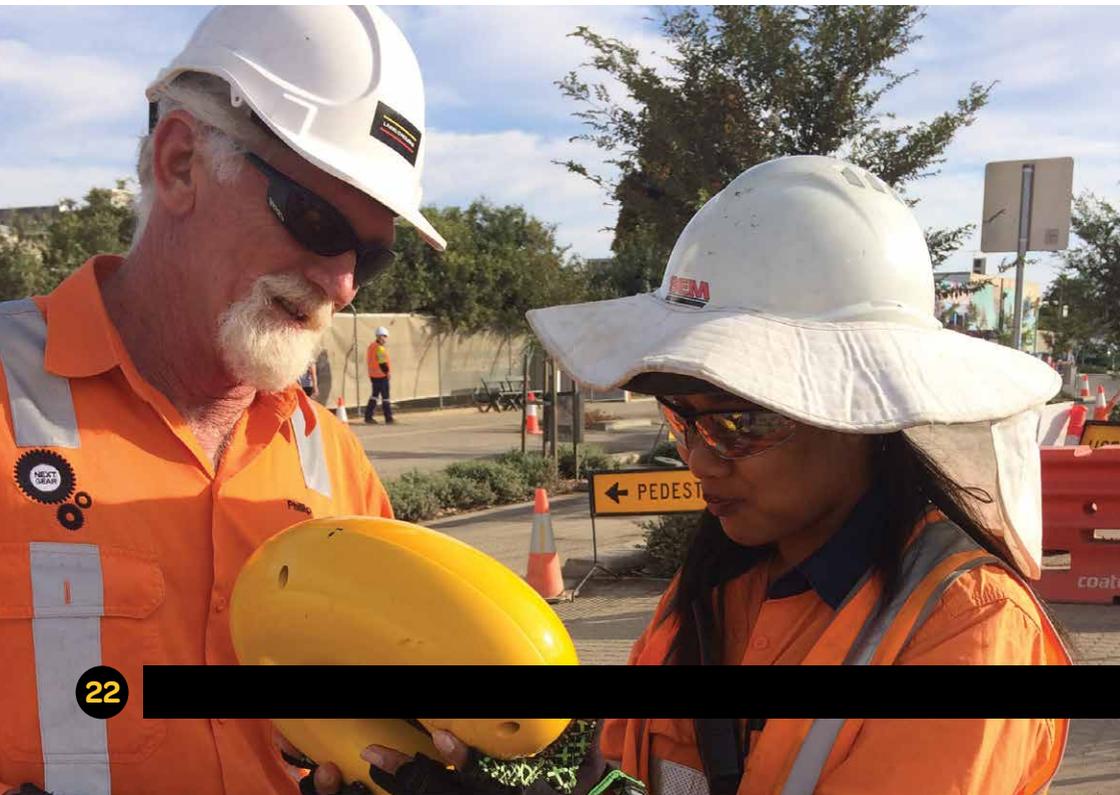
## Beyond Blue (24/7)

1300 224 636

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

## More contacts

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



Record your Employee Assistance Program here:

Record local health service number here:

Record your HR contact here:

**TrackSAFE  
Foundation**



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