

HOW TO ASK R U OK?

A practical guide for the the rail industry



They've said they're struggling.

I can show them I want to support them.



I'll start by asking:

Have you been
feeling this
way for a while?

Follow that train of thought.
There's more to say after R U OK?

RAIL R U OK? DAY™

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.



The TrackSAFE Foundation wants to encourage rail employees to support and engage with one another in conversations about how they are feeling by prompting them to answer one simple question: “Are you OK?”

This practical guide has been developed to help you ask that question.

As members of the Australian rail sector, we have a responsibility to support our workmates who may not be doing so well. This is particularly important for leaders in our industry; effective leaders demonstrate an understanding of the needs and feelings of others by listening and responding.

By partnering with R U OK? and championing the annual Rail R U OK?Day, we hope to both foster a working environment where asking this simple question becomes standard practice, and empower rail workers to identify the signs that someone might not be OK and offer guidance on how to listen and help.

In addition to following the practical steps within this guide, we encourage all those in management positions to consider additional training from reputable training organisations to further enhance your ability to support staff.

Thank you for supporting Rail R U OK?Day. If you need more information, please visit www.tracksafefoundation.com.au/rail-ruok-day

Yours sincerely,

Bob Herbert, AM

Chair

TrackSAFE Foundation

What's in the guide?

Simple, practical tools to help you.

- When to ask R U OK? 5
- Preparing for an R U OK? conversation 7
- Having an R U OK? conversation 8
- Supporting a team member in critical danger 10
- How to manage emotional reactions in a conversation 12
- Useful contacts for a staff member who's not OK 15



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.

Steps to help you have a conversation that could change a workmate's life

Preparing for an R U OK? conversation



1. Be ready



2. Be prepared



3. Pick your moment

How to have an R U OK? conversation



1. Ask R U OK?



2. Listen with an open mind

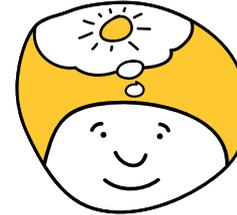


3. Encourage action



4. Check in

Preparing for an R U OK? conversation



1. Be ready

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



2. Be prepared

- Remember you won't have all the answers (which is OK)
- 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?



3. Pick your moment

- Have you chosen somewhere relatively private?
- What time will be good for them to chat? Make sure you have blocked out enough time in your diary (at least 30 minutes)



Starting a conversation



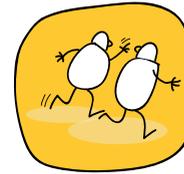
1. Ask R U OK?

- Be relaxed
- Help them open up by asking questions like “How are you going?” or “What’s been happening?” or “I’ve noticed that you’re not quite 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” or “I heard you had a rough day last week. How are you going?”



2. Listen with an open mind

- 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 by asking open questions like “What’s been happening?” or “Have you been feeling this way for a while?” or “So, what was that like?”
- If they get angry or upset, stay calm and don’t take it personally
- Check with the person that you have properly understood what they’ve said



3. Encourage action

- Try and encourage them to think of at least one step they could take to help them lighten the load
- Ask them: “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?”
- Good options for action might include talking to family, a trusted friend, their doctor or Employee Assistance Provider

Local contacts – Record the contact details for an appropriate manager or peer support officer:



4. Check in

- Try and get their agreement to check in again with them soon by asking something like, “Do you mind if I check in again soon to see how you’re travelling?”
- Ask if they’ve found a better way to manage the situation
- If they haven’t done anything, don’t judge them because they might just need someone to listen to them for the moment
- You could ask, “Do you think it would be useful if we looked into finding some professional or other support?”
- Understand that sometimes it can take a long time for someone to be ready to see a professional
- Try and remain optimistic about the benefits of getting help and try not to judge them
- Stay connected to them, your care and support can make a difference

Worried about their immediate safety?

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.

It's not an easy question to ask, so if you don't feel confident, calling a crisis helpline to seek some immediate guidance can be a good first step.

Otherwise, some guidance is provided below.

How do I ask?

"People in situations like this may be thinking about suicide. Have you thought about killing yourself?"

If they say yes, the most important things for you to do are to:

- 1 keep them safe – do not leave them alone.
- 2 get them some immediate professional help.

To keep them safe, remove any dangerous items from their physical location, particularly if they have mentioned a suicide plan.

If they share details of their plan with you, don't agree to keep these or their suicidal thoughts a secret.

Keep talking and listening to them. Be positive about the role professionals can play in helping them through tough times. You can say things like:

- "I think it's time to link in with someone who can support you. I can help you find the right person to talk to."
- "You're not alone. We can figure this out together"
- "Who is a person you trust? I would like to call them so we can help you together."

Getting them to professional help can start with any of these options:

- Calling a crisis support line together
- accompanying them to an Emergency Department
- accompanying them to a community or recovery centre
- Taking them somewhere that feels safe to them but does not mean they are alone.

If you believe their life is in immediate danger or you are finding the situation difficult to manage, call 000.



What if they say I'm fine?

- 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.

How to manage emotional reactions in a conversation

From time to time, someone may have a strong reaction during an R U OK? conversation.

Here are some things you can do to minimise awkwardness and reduce the pressure in these situations:

- Be prepared
- Allow the person to express their emotions fully (i.e. let off steam) and show them that you're interested by actively listening to all they say

- Recognise their reaction may be in response to a range of circumstances - both personal and work related - many of which you might not know about
- Deal with the emotions first, you can then discuss the issues more rationally once emotions have been addressed
- 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
- Validate their response but keep the focus on the issue at hand.

How do I deal with anger?

- If someone is visibly hostile you can respond with: "I can see that 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 "Right, I understand that... is also a problem. What else is causing you concern?"
- Be patient and be prepared to listen to them itemise all the points
- Use active listening to keep the conversation on track and to reassure them that you are interested in all they say. Asking this can be helpful: "So, the thing that is 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 and formal channels for specific complaints to be heard.

How do I deal with anxiety?

- Speak in short, concise sentences but still show concern and care
- If you anticipate an anxious response, use your preparation time to construct your message in clear, brief sentences
- Make sure you appear calm. This is best displayed through deep, slow breathing, a lower tone of voice and evenly paced speech

How do I deal with sadness?

- Sad or tragic stories are often difficult to deal with because we empathise with the person and feel helpless as we cannot take away their sadness or pain
- 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”
- Check that there is support available, such as the EAP
- Make sure you’re comfortable with any silence in the conversation
- Know that silence gives them permission to add more and to tell you more
- 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, make sure you have tissues handy.



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

SANE Australia:

1800 187 263

sane.org

Suicide Call Back Service (24/7)

1300 659 467

suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Mensline (support over the phone or online for men)

1300 78 99 78

mensline.org.au

Beyond Blue (24/7)

1300 224 636

beyondblue.org.au

More contacts

ruok.org.au/findhelp

Record your Employee Assistance Program here:

Record local health service number here:

Record your HR contact here:

RAIL RU OK? DAY™

ruok.org.au