



Mental health handbook for small business owners.

RUOK?TM
A conversation could change a life.

yellow



About R U OK?



R U OK? is a harm prevention charity that encourages us to stay connected and have conversations that can help others through difficult times in their lives.

Life's ups and downs happen to all of us so chances are someone you know might be struggling. Your genuine support can make a difference whatever they are facing, big or small.

R U OK? works to:

1. Build the confidence and skills of all Australians so they learn when and how to have an R U OK? conversation that could change a life
2. Encourage everyone to meaningfully connect with those in their world who might need support
3. Nurture our sense of shared responsibility and reinforce that we can all make a difference
4. Strengthen our sense of belonging because we know people are there for us

About our partnership.

Yellow Pages is proud to join R U OK? as their Small Business Partner.

As champions of Australian small business owners, we are passionate about protecting the mental health of business owners and their staff.

We appreciate that it can be difficult to start a conversation with someone you're worried about. This has become even more challenging as we deal with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our personal life and business operations.

Through our partnership with R U OK? we can provide practical resources that enable small business owners to safeguard their mental wellbeing and that of their most important asset: their staff.



When to ask: R U OK?

WHAT ARE THEY
SAYING?

WHAT ARE THEY
DOING

WHAT'S GOING
ON IN THEIR
LIFE

If you've noticed someone hasn't been their usual self, whether via their actions or words, it's time to trust your gut instinct and take action.

Perhaps they seem agitated, abrupt or withdrawn? By asking "Are you OK?" and commenting on the changes you've noticed, you could help them open up. If they say they're not OK, you can follow our conversation steps to show them they're supported and help them find strategies to better manage the load. If they are OK, they'll know you're someone who cares enough to ask.

Small business owners wear many hats but you might not have the specialist skills that a mental health professional or someone working in HR can use to address sensitive subjects.

If you're not confident approaching the situation yourself, help is available. Organisations including [Employee Matters](#) and [Ai GROUP](#) offer consultation services to assist and provide peace of mind that you are doing the right thing.

R U OK? has also developed a four step framework to guide you through navigating a conversation with someone who's not OK.



Starting the conversation.

Once you've recognised that someone in your team may be struggling and have genuine concerns for their wellbeing, it can be difficult to know how to begin the conversation.

Before you can look out for others, R U OK? suggest you need to look out for yourself. And that's OK. If you're not in the right headspace or you don't think you're the right person to have the conversation, try to think of someone else in their support network who could talk to them.

To help you decide whether you're ready to start a meaningful conversation, ask yourself:



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 that you won't have all the answers (which is OK)
- If someone is talking about personal struggles this can be difficult and they might get emotional, embarrassed or upset



3. Pick your moment

- Have you chosen somewhere relatively private and informal?
- What time will be good for them to chat? Ideally try and put aside at least an hour so you have ample time to have a meaningful chat
- If they can't talk when you approach them, ask them for a better time to have a chat

Deciding where to have the conversation can be just as important as when and knowing what to say. In many small business environments, such as retail stores or building sites there isn't private meeting space available, so consider getting a coffee, going for a walk or grabbing a bite instead.

A change of environment, away from other staff members, can make someone feel more comfortable to open up and express themselves.



ALEC – 4 steps of an R U OK? conversation



1. Ask R U OK?

- Be relaxed, friendly and concerned in your approach
- Help them open up by asking questions like "How are you going?" or "What's been happening?"
- Mention specific things that have made you concerned for them, like "You seem less chatty than usual. How are you going?"

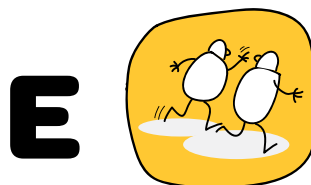
IF

- If they don't want to talk, don't criticise them
- Tell them you're still concerned about changes in their behaviour and you care about them
- Avoid a confrontation
- You could say: "Please call me if you ever want to chat" or "Is there someone else you'd rather talk to?"



2. Listen with an open mind

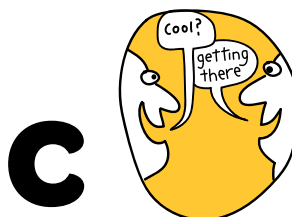
- Take what they say seriously and don't interrupt or rush the conversation
- Don't judge their experiences or reactions but acknowledge that things seem tough for them
- If they need time to think, sit patiently with the silence
- Encourage them to explain: "How are you feeling about that?" or "How long have you felt that way?"
- Show that you've listened by repeating back what you've heard (in your own words) and ask if you have understood them properly



3. Encourage action

Once they've opened up, encourage them to access support or to do something that might lighten the load. You could ask:

- "What have you done in the past to manage similar situations?"
- "How would you like me to support you?"
- "What's something you can do for yourself right now? Something that's enjoyable or relaxing?"
- You could say: "When I was going through a difficult time, I tried this... You might find it useful too"
- If they've been feeling really down for more than 2 weeks, encourage them to see a trusted health professional. You could say, "It might be useful to link in with someone who can support you. I'm happy to assist you to find the right person to talk to"
- Be positive about the role of professionals in getting through tough times



4. Check in

- Pop a reminder in your calendar to call them in a couple of weeks. If they're really struggling, follow up with them sooner
- You could say: "I've been thinking of you and wanted to know how you've been going since we last chatted"
- Ask if they've found a better way to manage the situation. If they haven't done anything, don't judge them. They might just need someone to listen to them for the moment
- Stay in touch and be there for them. Genuine care and concern can make a real difference



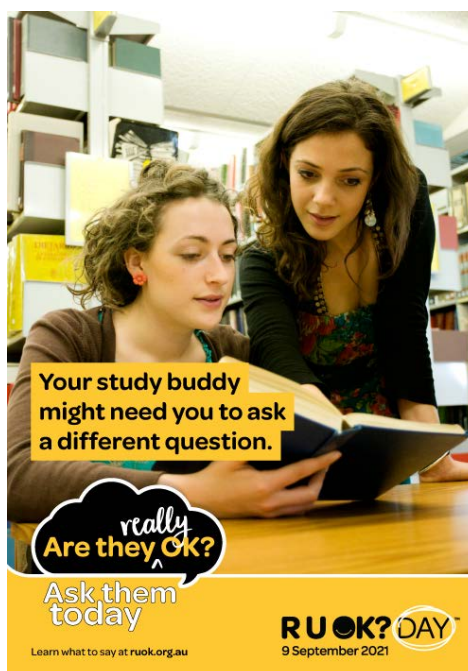
Are they really OK? Ask them today.



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Ways small business owners can provide support to staff.

As a small business owner, you'll know the highs and lows of running your own company. While it can be incredibly rewarding, both mentally and financially, stress and challenges are not withstanding.

As an employer, you can face a range of unique challenges that can affect your mental health and the mental health of your staff.

It's fair to say it has been testing with COVID-19 adversely affecting the majority of people and industries. If it's taught us anything though, it's that fostering a healthy work environment is beneficial to everyone. And everyone across the organisation, no matter how big or small, has a role to play.

Small businesses are often family-like in nature, especially in smaller working environments such as retail and salons, so it's only natural to become close with staff. That in turn can see you in a position to recognise when someone isn't being themselves.

Supporting your team supports your business.

When someone in your team is struggling, it is normal to worry about the impacts it will have on your business, but by supporting your staff first, you will also support your business in the long-term.

- It demonstrates that you value your staff and their wellbeing
- If you support someone during a hard time, it will promote a sense of loyalty to your business
- It will create a more open and inviting work place
- It will encourage others to speak up if they are struggling



Potential signs someone isn't OK.

- Unmotivated or moody
- Coming in late or taking days off regularly
- Making more mistakes than usual
- Being withdrawn and/or not engaging in conversation

There are myriad reasons someone may display one or more of the above signs, and while it may be something small or short term, having a conversation and letting them know they are supported can make a big difference.

If someone in your team is struggling, you may be able to make small changes in their job that assists them to get well and stay well.

In some industries, such as building and construction, where there has long been an unfortunate stigma around staying tough and not opening up about mental health, consider turning to the likes of [Mates in Construction](#). Mates has trained more than 180,000 workers as part of their program which develops life-saving skills to recognise when a co-worker may be doing it tough, and how to step in.

You can learn more about the signs someone might be struggling at www.ruok.org.au/signs



What to do if someone says they're not OK

Starting a conversation with someone in your team you are concerned about is a great starting point to demonstrate that they are supported and encourage them to open up. If they are OK, they'll know you're someone who cares enough to ask. But what if they're not OK?

You need to prepare yourself for that possibility. If they don't want to speak about it, respect their choice, but leave the door open for further dialogue. If they do want to talk about it, there are some things you can do to encourage a meaningful conversation.

Be patient and listen.

Be patient and make your staff member feel comfortable to open up in their own time. Book out ample time in your calendar to ensure your conversation is not cut short or they feel under pressure. Ask them if they would like to talk about things and listen to what they have to say without interrupting.

Be empathetic.

Be kind and empathetic, without making any judgments. A simple, 'I'm sorry to hear that' is a good initial response. Let them know that you care and that their mental wellbeing is important to you.

Ask questions.

Focus on asking questions rather than trying to provide solutions. Everyone deals with things in their own way and what may have worked for you or someone you know will not necessarily work for your employee.

Ask questions around whether there is anything you can do – from a work perspective – to help alleviate stress or anxiety. Some good starting points include:

- How can I help?
- Is there anything I can do for you right now?

You might be able to make changes to their role or working environment to enable them to fulfill their work duties while they are going through a difficult time.

If you are in a position and industry where remote working is feasible, provide the option, especially if coming into the office or job site is adding to their stresses.

If your business provides a service, such as health and beauty or electrical needs, think about ways your employee can share their expertise on your online platforms, such as blogs or social media posts. A change may be just the thing to boost their motivation and encourage new skills.

Offer support.

Ask whether they have access to professional support. Offer to help them find it if they do not, as help is available to everyone, regardless of their financial situation. A number of resources are available which you can find on page 9.

Follow up.

Let your employee know that you are there to offer continual support and check in with them over a walk or coffee in the coming weeks.

[R U OK?](#) has also developed conversation steps and strategies you can implement to show someone they're supported and help them find strategies to better manage the load.



Resources.

For more information about R U OK?
and how to build an R U OK? workplace
culture visit ruok.org.au

If you or someone you know is struggling there are a
number of Australian professionals and crisis lines that
can be contacted:

Lifeline

13 11 14

Lifeline.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service

1300 659 467

Suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Beyond Blue

1300 224 636

Beyondblue.org.au

SANE Australia

1800 18 SANE (7263)

Sane.org