



Hey Sport,  
**RUOK?**<sup>™</sup>

**Be the coach that changes lives. Ask R U OK?**

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



The **Hey Sport R U OK?** campaign is backed by the QBE Foundation - a major partner of R U OK?

This resource was developed with input and advice from the R U OK? Sport Advisory Group



“A good coach can change a game. A great coach can change a life.” John Wooden

## Why use this?

**Hey Sport R U OK?** is an all-of-sport-community approach to empower and build confidence amongst potential ‘help-givers’ as part of our shared responsibility to ensure all members of our sporting community feel safe and supported.

Getting to know your athletes is one of the most enjoyable aspects of being a coach but sharing the ups and down of their lives isn’t always easy.

You might think, “What on earth can I do to help, I’m a coach, this isn’t my job?”

But regardless of what it says in the coaching manual , it’s likely that at some stage every coach will be called on to be an ‘accidental counsellor’.

Good performance in sport comes from good planning, preparation and practice. Coaches can use these same three principles to check in with their athletes and support their wellbeing.

To help you know when and learn how to ask “Are you OK?” we’ve developed this practical conversation guide that also includes information on how to respond appropriately to anyone who says, “No. I’m not OK.”

# Hey Sport, this is your R U OK? culture

An R U OK? culture is one built on mutual respect, trust, authenticity and a willingness to support those in your world who might be struggling.

Building that culture isn't down to one person, it's a team effort.

The ten principles listed on the following page are your guide to the values and behaviours that create an R U OK? culture in your sport.



- 1 Coaches, officials and athletes demonstrate improvements in life skills and self-esteem
- 2 Athletes like and feel supported by their coach and peers
- 3 Coaches, officials and athletes exhibit kindness towards others
- 4 Sport is a positive and enjoyable experience for all involved
- 5 Coaches, officials and athletes promote a team environment based on mutual respect and positive relationships
- 6 Coaches, officials and administrators create a physically and emotionally safe environment
- 7 Coaches encourage athletes to work with and support members of their sporting community
- 8 Coaches, officials and athletes are confident they can spot the signs someone in their sporting community might be struggling with life
- 9 Coaches, officials and athletes feel confident and willing to have a meaningful R U OK? conversation
- 10 Coaches, officials and athletes feel a sense of connection and belonging within their sport community

# What's in the guide?


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- The signs it might be time to start a conversation 8
- Simple, practical tools to help you have a conversation 10
- Managing emotional reactions during a conversation 17
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## How conversations can make a difference

### Did you know?

- Life's challenges can leave people feeling helpless, hopeless, afraid, disconnected and at genuine risk
- Early-intervention and open communication can reduce stigma, break down barriers and build trust which in turn promotes long-term, positive behavioural change that saves lives now and into the future
- A simple way to provide support is by genuinely asking "Are you OK?" and being prepared to have regular meaningful conversations to help someone who might be struggling to feel supported when confronted with challenges in life whether at home, work, school or in sport.



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

## 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 some 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
- Lonely or lacking self-esteem
- Concerned they're trapped or in pain

### WHAT ARE THEY

#### DOING

#### Are they:

- Experiencing mood swings
- Dismissive or defensive
- Self-medicating
- Becoming withdrawn
- Not training or competing in the way you would normally expect
- Changing their online behaviour
- Behaving recklessly
- Unable to concentrate
- Losing interest in what they used to love
- Less interested in their appearance and personal hygiene
- Changing their sleep patterns
- Changing their appearance

### WHAT'S GOING ON IN THEIR

#### LIFE

#### Have they experienced:

- A traumatic incident
- A change in work circumstances or job responsibilities
- Issues at school
- Increased pressure from relocation or changed living arrangements
- Conflict at work, at home or at training
- Relationship issues
- Becoming a parent
- Major health issues or an injury
- Constant stress
- Financial difficulty
- Loss of someone or something they care about

# Simple steps to an R U OK? conversation

## Getting ready to ask



**Be ready**



**Be prepared**



**Pick your moment**

## Having the conversation



**1. Ask R U OK?**



**3. Encourage Action**



**2. Listen**



**4. Check In**

## Getting ready to ask



**Be ready**

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



**Be prepared**

- Remember that 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 this can be difficult and they might be emotional, embarrassed or upset





## 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 30 minutes so the conversation isn't rushed
- You might find that during breaks, or before/after shifts are good times to chat
- If they can't talk when you approach them, suggest another time to have a conversation
- It might be more comfortable for the person to be side-by-side with you (e.g. walking together or driving rather than face-to-face)

## 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?"
- Make an observation. Mention specific things that have made you concerned about them, like "I've noticed that you seem really tired recently" or "You seem less chatty than usual. How are you going?"



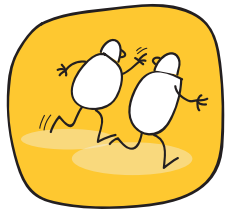
## What if they don't want to talk to me?

- Try not to take it personally if they don't want to talk. They might not be ready to talk or it might take them time to realise that you genuinely care.
- Respect their decision not to talk; don't force them into it or criticise them
- Focus on some things 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, like a family member or friend. You could say, "You can always call me 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.



## 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 and don't rush in with solutions
- Encourage them to explain
- If they get angry or upset, stay calm and don't take it personally
- Let them know you're asking because you're concerned



## 3. Encourage action

- 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 you right now?"
- Ask: "Has anything or anyone helped in the past?"
- Suggest they do something that they know helps them relax or brings them joy (e.g. go for a walk, see a movie, have a bath, swim etc.)
- Once they've opened up, encourage them to access support or to do something that might lighten the load
- Good options for action might include talking to family, a trusted friend, their doctor, the sport's welfare or member protection officer or a trusted health professional



## 4. Check in

- Remember to check in a few days later to see how the person is doing
- Ask if they've found a better way to manage the situation
- If they haven't done anything, keep encouraging them and remind them you're always there if they need a chat
- Understand that sometimes it can take a long time for someone to be ready to see a professional
- Try to reinforce the benefits of seeking professional help and trying different avenues
- You could ask, "Do you think it would be useful if we looked into finding some professional or other support?"



## 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 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.

## Managing emotional reactions during a conversation

From time to time, we can face strong reactions 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
- Recognise their reaction might be in response to a range of circumstances - both personal and work related - some of which you might not know about
- Allow the person to fully express their emotions (i.e. let off steam) and show them you're interested by actively listening to all they say
- Deal with the emotions first, you can 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



## 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 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.”
- 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 be the sport’s welfare officer, work Employment Assistance Program (EAP) or a school counsellor. You can also encourage them to speak to family, friends or a trusted health professional.
- 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.

## 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 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 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 how you will say what you need to in a clear way
- Stay calm. This is best displayed through deep, slow breathing, a lower tone of voice and evenly paced speech.



## Useful contacts for someone who's not OK

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

### **Beyond Blue (24/7)**

1300 224 636  
beyondblue.org.au

### **Lifeline (24/7)**

13 11 14  
lifeline.org.au

### **Suicide Call Back Service (24/7)**

1300 659 467  
suicidecallbackservice.org.au

### **SANE Australia:**

1800 18 SANE (7263)  
sane.org

### **MensLine (24/7)**

1300 78 99 78  
mensline.org.au

### **More contacts:**

ruok.org.au/findhelp

### **Local contacts**

- Record the contact details for any support services recommended by your club or association:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Record the contact details for a local GP, external local health service or helpline:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Record the contact details for an appropriate sport administrator or member protection officer for your club or association:  
\_\_\_\_\_

**R U OK?™**

A conversation could change a life.

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 **QBE** | Foundation

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