# R U OK? DAY: A TOOLKIT FOR LEADERS

# What is R U OK? Day?

R U OK? day is a national day of action dedicated to reminding people to ask family, friends and colleagues, ‘Are you ok?’. This year R U OK? Day falls on Thursday 10 September. The purpose is to inspire and empower everyone to meaningfully connect with people around them on a regular basis to make a difference to anyone who might be struggling. It’s a way for us to reach out and demonstrate that we genuinely care.

This R U OK? toolkit provides some practical tools and strategies for us to have these wellbeing conversations within our teams not just on R U OK? Day, but throughout the year.

Take time to listen, encourage support and check in regularly with your teams, while using the resources and supports available to you for guidance. This [informative video](https://youtu.be/erHLP29tzPE) highlights these steps.

Doing what you can to promote an inclusive culture in your teams will enable people to share their stories of mental illness and get support. In addition to promoting wellbeing conversations and an inclusive culture, asking all staff what they need to do their work, including discussions about flexible work arrangements can also help.

It is also important to bear in mind that mental health is a continuum, and that at any point someone may not have a diagnosed or diagnosable condition but due to the current circumstances may not be in a healthy space. R U OK? Day is about starting the conversation, removing the stigma from mental health and saying that it is ok to not be ok. Because of this stigma and stereotypes in the community, many people who do have a mental illness may not be comfortable to disclose this at work, R U OK? Day creates a space for everyone to have wellbeing conversations without feeling they need to disclose more information. Mental illness can be considered a disability and staff with a mental illness can request reasonable adjustments to assist them to manage their illness and recovery.

We all have the right to work in a safe, inclusive and respectful environment where we feel supported. We encourage everyone across the Department to have these wellbeing conversations with their colleagues. These conversations are a great way for all of us to build on the Whole of Victorian Government [Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/employcond/Pages/MHW-Charter.aspx) framework and play an active role in creating positive wellbeing experiences within our teams.

# How can you use R U OK? Day to support your team’s wellbeing?

## Have regular wellbeing conversations

We can all make a difference by having regular, meaningful conversations about life’s ups and downs with our colleagues. Remember, you don’t have to be an expert to have a caring, meaningful conversation.

* If you notice that someone’s not travelling well, take the time to ask how they’re going.
* Follow the **R U OK? four steps:**
1. **Ask R U OK?**
2. **Listen with an open mind**
3. **Explore options and encourage action**
4. **Check in**
* Be respectful - there might be some who may not want to have that conversation with you, and that’s ok. In this instance, your role might be about ensuring that they are accessing supports and offering practical solutions around workload and time off to assist them.
* Empathise - we all go through times when we might be struggling to cope with the multiple demands placed on us – both in and outside of work.
* To build your confidence, rehearse conversations using the [R U OK? resources](https://www.ruok.org.au/how-to-ask).
* For more tips on having the conversation, visit the [‘How to Ask’](http://www.ruok.org.au/how-to-ask) page, download the [R U OK? Conversation Guide](https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/22b3e3c9/files/uploaded/RUOKDay2020_ConversationGuide_LR_cHzBE5EXT2VeGCensfph.pdf) or see the Department’s ‘Supportive Conversation Starter Cards’. Download versions for [principals and school leaders](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/sites/i/Shared%20Documents/conversations-prins.pdf&action=default), [school staff](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/sites/i/Shared%20Documents/conversations-colleagues.pdf&action=default), [corporate people managers](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/sites/i/Shared%20Documents/conversations-managers.pdf&action=default) and for [all corporate staff](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/sites/i/Shared%20Documents/conversations-allstaff.pdf&action=default).

## There’s more to say after R U OK?

2020 has been a challenging year for many and circumstances have made it even more important to stay connected, check in and support those around us if we’re able. We need to know what to say if someone responds that they aren’t ok. Remember, you do not need to solve their problems but guide and assist them to access appropriate supports. There may also be those who may not wish to have the conversation with you, but will feel appreciative of the check in.

It’s important that we know the steps and feel confident to take them. Here are some tips and guidance you can provide to your colleagues to help enable them to have these conversations.

There may be times when the conversation becomes a lot bigger than your skill set and confidence level, and the person you are speaking to indicates significant distress. Please remember that you do not need to have all the answers, but ensuring their safety is important. Start by asking them:

* Do they have someone nearby who can provide them with immediate support? Is there someone they or you can call to be with them and ensure that they get assistance?
* Do they have a regular doctor, psychologist or counsellor that they contact immediately?
* If they do not, do they need encouragement to access the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or another support service?
* Do you need to debrief after the conversation or gain assistance from Manager Assist to support you to ensure their safety?
* Assessing a person’s risk levels by asking them about suicidal thoughts or ideation is highly unlikely to encourage suicidality but may give you an understanding of their safety.
* Contact 000 and ask for assistance if appropriate.

## CELEBRATE R U OK? DAY

Many teams might like to get together for a virtual morning or afternoon tea – it gives people the opportunity to talk to each other about things that aren’t directly related to work and to get to know each other a little bit more.

However, the event doesn’t need to be a morning tea – it can be whatever you prefer. In fact, if it’s an event you can do regularly throughout the year, even better.

Some ideas might include:

* hosting a wellbeing activity for your team (refer to the Appendix for a simple activity that you could use to start a wellbeing discussion in your team)
* organising a coffee roulette – randomly pair up team members and encourage a virtual catch up together
* getting your colleagues involved to help plan an event on the day. Consider alternative activities, like a stretch/yoga class, or online cooking session to involve those with different interests
* organising an exercise-based team challenge – mental health can be improved by physical activity
* promoting your event using tips and resources from the official [R U OK?](https://www.ruok.org.au/) Website

**Encourage your team to register for the ‘Having Wellbeing Conversations with Peers’ webinar on R U OK? Day**

This year, the Department is running two sessions of the ‘Having wellbeing conversations with peers’ webinar on R U OK? Day. All staff are encouraged to attend.

The free 45-minute webinars at 11:30am and 3:45pm are being provided to help staff develop core skills in approaching peers to have a wellbeing conversation. For more information and to register, visit the [Eventbrite page.](https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/department-of-education-and-training-staying-safe-and-well-series-tickets-104489115758)

## R U Ok? Day, Every day – keeping the message alive

It’s also important that we keep this message and the spirit of R U OK? alive, beyond the day itself. It’s about embracing these conversations as a part of our culture and how we work collectively to support each other. Connecting with others in a meaningful way helps support our wellbeing, improve our relationships and build a sense of belonging and purpose.

* Welcome to new and returning team members during team meetings.
* Assign a mentor or ‘buddy’ to new and returning members; look for volunteer mentors or buddies from other teams within your area to vary conversations. You can arrange this within your teams, or staff with disabilities or long-term health conditions are also able to participate in the [DET Enablers Network Buddy Program.](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edrms/organisation/DETEN/DEN_W/Enablers-Induction-Buddy-Program/EN_BuddyProgram.pdf)
* Support meaningful ‘shadowing opportunities’ for staff who would like to develop new skills, share their knowledge and skills, and interact with other areas or people.
* Promote a weekly ‘time-out’ virtual morning tea or lunchtime activity such as trivia, crosswords, share photos, share stories.
* Form a social committee to keep the fun activities, charity events, team milestones, celebrations rolling all year long. There are still plenty of things that can be done remotely to keep everyone connected socially.
* Build relationships with your colleagues – remember to begin and end virtual catch ups with saying hello and goodbye each day or thank you when someone has helped you. These simple gestures may mean the difference between someone communicating with you when in need.

## Supporting materials available for wellbeing and R U OK? Day

**External resources**

* [R U OK? website](https://www.ruok.org.au/), [including posters](https://www.ruok.org.au/every-day-resources), [supportive guide](https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/22b3e3c9/files/uploaded/RUOKDay2020_GuidetoSupportingRUOKDay_LR.pdf) and [practical tools for the workplace](https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/22b3e3c9/files/uploaded/RUOK_How%20to%20ask%20staff_WorkBooklet_A5.pdf)
* [R U OK? How to ask and support colleagues resource](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/employcond/Pages/MHW-Charter.aspx)
* [R U OK? LGBTI+ Resources](https://www.ruok.org.au/lgbti-resources)
* R U OK? Stronger Together campaign – in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
* Super Friend’s [top tips to safely approach R U OK? day](https://www.superfriend.com.au/news/safely-approaching-r-u-ok/) and [what to do if the answer is no](https://www.superfriend.com.au/news/r-u-ok-what-to-do-if-the-answer-is-no/)

**DET resources**

* Share these downloadable virtual ‘supportive conversation cards’ for useful prompts and discussion points to refer to when having conversations. The cards also include a list of relevant supports to help guide someone in the right direction if you think they may benefit from additional support. These cards are available for [principals and school leaders](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/sites/i/Shared%20Documents/conversations-prins.pdf&action=default), [school staff](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/sites/i/Shared%20Documents/conversations-colleagues.pdf&action=default), [corporate people managers](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/sites/i/Shared%20Documents/conversations-managers.pdf&action=default) and for [all corporate staff](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/sites/i/Shared%20Documents/conversations-allstaff.pdf&action=default). Encourage your staff to save to their desktop for easy access, or print them to have them handy on their desk.
* DET LGBTIQ Awareness and Ally training is available on LearnEd. These learning modules promote LGBTIQ workplace inclusion, provide practical tools to ensure everyone in the workplace feels welcomed, valued and respected and provide you with an understanding of what it means to be an ally.
* DET Disability Awareness training, available on LearnEd. This session aims to provide you with an understanding of accessibility and inclusion in the workplace.
* For information about requesting workplace adjustments or to understand more about the ways that the Department support all staff including the Diversity and inclusion work, contact diversity@education.vic.gov.au
* [DET Enablers Network](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edrms/organisation/DETEN/Pages/default.aspx) represent the needs, interests and concerns of Department employees with lived experience of disability or long-term health conditions. For enquiries email: det.enablers@education.vic.gov.au
* Employee Assistance Program (EAP), is a personalised, confidential counselling service for all Department staff, including their immediate family (aged 18 years and over). This service is available 24/7 and specialised counsellors are available for anyone wanting support with aboriginal, LGBTIQ or family violence matters. Call 1300 361 008 or use that chat function on the [LifeWorks Australia website](https://www.lifeworks.com/au/) to book.
* Manager Assist is a coaching service for principals, school leaders and managers, providing advice and support on a range of issues including approaching a difficult conversation with employees and managing the impact of mental health issues within the workplace. Call 1300 361 008 to book.
* The Department is continuing to deliver a series of free webinars to help support the wellbeing of all staff. The sessions provide practical mental health and wellbeing tips and strategies for use through coronavirus (COVID-19) and beyond. Visit the wellbeing webinars page for [schools](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/Pages/School.aspx#/app/content/3248/support_and_service_(schools)%252Fcoronavirus_and_learning_from_home%252Fstaff_wellbeing_and_working_from_home%252Fhealth_and_wellbeing_webinars) or [corporate](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/pages/production.aspx#/app/content/3247/support_and_service_(corp)%252Fcoronavirus_and_working_from_home%252Fhealth_and_wellbeing%252Fhealth_and_wellbeing_webinars) to register.
* More information on the Department’s employee health, safety and wellbeing resources are available for [corporate](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/Pages/production.aspx#/app/content/2855/support_and_service_(corp)%252Fhuman_resources%252Fhealth,_safety_and_wellbeing%252Femployee_health,_safety_and_wellbeing_services) and [school](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/Pages/School.aspx#/app/content/3106/support_and_service_(schools)%252Fhuman_resources%252Femployee_health,_safety_and_wellbeing%252Femployee_health,_safety_and_wellbeing_services) staff.
* Staff who would like further information and resources on how to support student mental health can visit the Department’s [Mental Health Toolkit](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/mentalhealth/Pages/mentalhealthtoolkit.aspx).

**APPENDIX: TEAM ACTIVITY: THINK, PAIR, SHARE, CARE**

**This simple activity is designed to get teams talking about wellbeing and generate some helpful insights into how we can all build a more supportive and caring environment for each other.**

This activity may help team members to better:

* understand how their colleagues respond under pressure
* be more aware of the signs when their colleagues aren’t travelling well
* identify ways to support each other within the team

This activity can be run as part of a team meeting and requires 45 minutes to run. Please email out a copy of the [Wellbeing Activity Worksheet](#worksheet) below for each participant prior to the session.

*Please note, this activity is better suited for teams with up to 10 team members.*

Any member of the team can lead this activity using the steps below:

1. **Set the introduction and context**
* We all go through times when we might be struggling to cope with the multiple demands placed on us – both in and outside of work.
* As individuals, we all have different ways of responding to the pressures and challenges life throws at us.
* Similarly, our idea of what support looks like can also vary significantly (e.g., some of us may seek out support from others, while some of us may withdraw from people to have time to reflect and process before talking about it).
* It’s important to understand and respect each other’s different coping styles to be better equipped to support each other more effectively within our team.
* Through this simple exercise, we will first take some time to reflect on how we each cope under pressure, and then share our reflections with others in our team.
* We will then identify what support looks like for each of us, so that as a team, we are better equipped to support each other.
* **It is important to keep in mind that some of the things we discuss and share today may be quite personal. Please treat any information shared as part of this activity with respect and trust.**
1. **Use the activity instructions and questions provided as part of the worksheet to run the session**

Remember to have on hand a list of resources for people who might need to access further support. We recommend reminding your colleagues about the range of supports and resources available through the Department’s Employee Health, Safety and Wellbeing Supports pages for [corporate](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/Pages/production.aspx#/app/content/2855/support_and_service_(corp)%252Fhuman_resources%252Fhealth,_safety_and_wellbeing%252Femployee_health,_safety_and_wellbeing_services) and [school](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/Pages/School.aspx#/app/content/3106/support_and_service_(schools)%252Fhuman_resources%252Femployee_health,_safety_and_wellbeing%252Femployee_health,_safety_and_wellbeing_services) staff.

**IMPORTANT NOTE: Please do not use the Wellbeing Activity Worksheet below without setting the relevant context for the session (as described above). Without the right introduction and context, the activity may lose its impact.**

**WELLBEING ACTIVITY WORKSHEET**

**Step 1: Think**

We all have different ways in which we respond under pressure. Individually, spend **5 minutes** reflecting on and answering the following questions. This could be done prior to the meeting.

**My response to pressure**

**When I’m under pressure (focus on a work-related pressure like meeting tight deadlines) …**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *I feel…* How do you respond physically and emotionally? | *I act…* How do you typically behave or act? | *Others notice…*What do others notice about you when you’re under pressure? |
|  |  |  |

**What makes me feel supported**

**When I’m under pressure, I feel supported when…**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *I do…*What strategies do you personally draw on to look after yourself? | *Others do…*What kind of actions from others around you may help you feel supported? |
|  |  |

**Step 2: Pair**

Now, split off into separate calls in pairs to discuss what you’ve listed in Step 1.

Listen openly and reflect on what you’re hearing when the other person speaks.

Ask for examples to better understand the context and clarify.

Allow **10 minutes** for this activity (5 minutes each).

**Step 3: Share**

After 10 minutes, re-join the initial meeting and share your discussions with the broader team.

Each person will share what they have learnt about their colleague during Step 2, including:

* How do they typically react under pressure?
* What have you learnt about how best to support this colleague under pressure?

Allow **15 minutes** for this activity, ensuring each person has the time to share key insights about their colleague.

**Step 4: Care**

As a final step, think about how you can apply what you have learnt about your team members to how you work every day.

1. What can you do as a team to build stronger relationships with each other?
2. What are some activities you can do as a team to better support each other?
3. Identify 3 things:
* ***You*** will do differently as a result of this session
* ***The team*** can do differently as a result of this session

Allow **15 minutes** for this activity.