

# THE MATESHIP MANUAL

How to help someone who's doing it tough



**RUOK?**<sup>™</sup>

A conversation could change a life.

**“I love living out here.  
Couldn’t live anywhere  
else. But it can be tough.  
Looking out for each  
other is important.”**



There’s a lot of good things about living and working outside Australia’s bigger towns and cities, but it also has its unique challenges. Fewer services, isolation and extreme weather events are just a few of the things that can be harder to deal with out here.

- If someone you know – a family member, friend, neighbour or workmate - is doing it tough, they won’t always tell you.
- Sometimes it’s up to us to trust our gut instinct and ask someone who may be struggling with life “are you ok?”.
- By asking and listening, we can help our mates and others we care about feel more supported and connected long before they even think about suicide.
- It’s something we can all do by following a few simple steps.


# Spotting the problem

Sometimes the cause of someone's struggle is something obvious and affects everyone in the community like a drought, flood or bushfire.

More often it's something personal like financial worries or the breakdown of a relationship. But while the signs can sometimes be subtle and very hard to spot, there can be clues that someone's not doing so well.

When somebody stops answering and returning calls, for example, or when they don't turn up to a BBQ or you just don't see them much anymore. You might just have a gut feeling that something's not quite right.

**Don't ignore it. Find some time to ask if they're ok.**

- 
- Not returning calls
  - Not turning up to things
  - Not themselves



## But it's none of my business

Most of us value our own privacy and respect other peoples' – especially if we don't know them well. You tell yourself "it's none of my business", and that it's unlikely they'll want to talk about it anyway. But the truth is, when we become too afraid or embarrassed to support someone who is struggling with life then feelings of isolation can get much worse for the person, much faster. And sometimes with tragic consequences.

Even when you do make the first move, there's no guarantee that you'll get them to open up – but at least they'll know that someone cares.

# Starting the conversation with someone you're worried about

- If they don't live with you, find a reason to go and see them. Borrow something, return something, give them something, just drop in to see how they're going. Ask if they can come over and give you a hand with something.
- Pick your moment. If they can't talk when you approach them, ask for a better time to come back.
- Have a relaxed and friendly approach.
- Let them know you've noticed a change. Make an observation:  
"I haven't seen much of you lately, is everything going ok?"  
"We missed you at the last meeting, how are things going?"  
"So how are you travelling these days?"



## Listening to their story

- Be prepared to listen - not try and solve their problems.
- Have an open mind.
- Don't rush or interrupt. Let them speak in their own time.
- Let them know you're asking because you're concerned:  
"I'm worried about you"  
"Sometimes talking about it can really help"  
"Why don't you start from the beginning, I'll make us a cuppa"

Nothing beats a face to face conversation. But a phone conversation can be very powerful when distance is a challenge.



## Dealing with denial

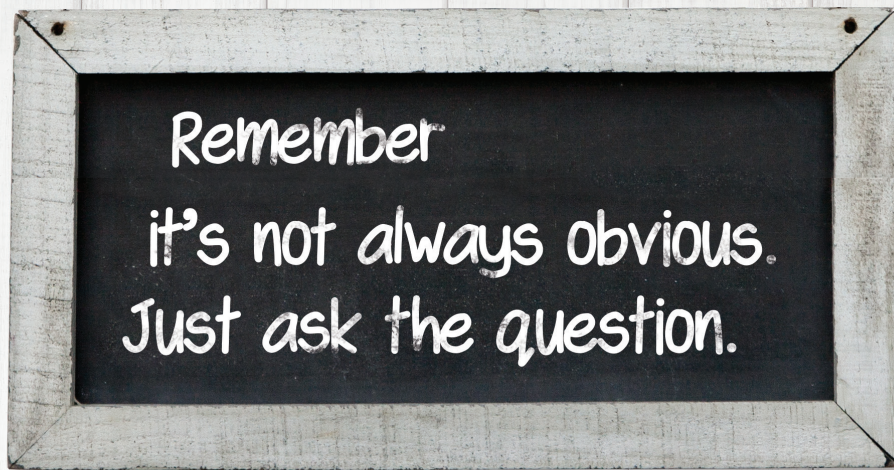
- Sometimes a person will deny there's a problem, even though you might think otherwise. Ask them "Are you really ok? You just don't seem yourself" but don't push it too hard.
- Maybe it's too personal. Maybe they're ashamed. Maybe you've got it wrong and they're fine. Just remind them that you're always there if they need a chat.
- The fact that you have reached out to them might encourage them to reflect on how they're doing..."I thought I was doing such a good job keeping my troubles to myself but others are noticing. Maybe I should talk to someone."

## Encouraging action

- You won't always have the answers, or be able to provide advice to the person. In fact, sometimes it's better not to give advice. Some problems are too big for mates and family to solve and they need professional help.
- Try and encourage them to take some action.
- Ask them:
  - "Where do you think we can go from here?"
  - "What do you need from me? How can I help?"
  - "What would be a good first step we can take?"
  - "Have you thought about going to see the doctor?"
  - "I've got some numbers that might help"

# Check in

- Try and get their agreement to check in again with them soon:  
“Do you mind if I drop by again soon to see how you’re travelling?”
- It’s helpful to follow up in a few days to see how the person is doing. This shows them that you genuinely care and want to help:  
“How’d you go speaking to the doc?”  
“Did you end up making an appointment?”  
“Did you try one of the numbers I gave you?”
- If they’ve had a bad experience with a helpline or doctor, encourage them to keep trying.
- Ask if they’ve found a better way to manage the situation. You could ask: “Would it be useful if we tried to find some other options to help you get through this?”
- Understand that sometimes it takes time to admit you need help. Stick with them and know that your support means a lot.
- Make sure you’re ok and in a good headspace to support others. Your health and wellbeing is important too.



# Support is available from the following organisations

Call on these Australian crisis lines or professionals:

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

13 11 14

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

## **Headspace (for 12-25 yrs)**

1800 650 890

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

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

1300 659 467

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

## **Mensline (24/7)**

1300 78 99 78

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

## **Kids Helpline (24/7) (For 5-25 yrs)**

1800 55 1 800

[kidshelp.com.au](http://kidshelp.com.au)

## **PANDA**

(Perinatal Anxiety & Depression)

1300 726 306

[www.panda.org.au](http://www.panda.org.au)

## **beyondblue (24/7)**

1300 224 636

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

For more contacts: [www.ruok.org.au](http://www.ruok.org.au)



A conversation could change a life.

# Remember these simple steps to starting a conversation



**1. Ask R U OK?**



**2. Listen with an open mind**



**3. Encourage action**



**4. Check in**

For more information and tips  
[ruok.org.au](http://ruok.org.au)

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