



Part 2: Getting Ready to Ask

Before you can look out for others, 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 your colleague’s support network who could talk to them. To help you decide whether you’re ready to start a meaningful conversation, ask yourself:

Am I ready?

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

Am I prepared?

- Do I understand that if I ask how someone’s doing, the answer could be: “I’m not doing well.”
- Do I understand that I can’t fix someone’s problems?
- Do I accept that they might not be ready to talk, or they might not want to talk to me?

Have I picked my moment?

- Have I chosen somewhere relatively private and comfortable?
- Have I figured out a time that will be good for them to talk?
- Have I made sure I have enough time to talk?

Contacts for someone who’s not OK:

- [UI EAP](https://www.eaphelp@uiowa.edu) – 319-335-2085 or eaphelp@uiowa.edu
- [UI 24/7 Support & Crisis Line](https://www.uiowa.edu/247) – 844-461-5420
- [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](https://www.988lifeline.org/)

Start a conversation using these 4 steps



Tips on How to Ask

Ask R U OK?

- Be relaxed, friendly, and concerned in your approach.
- Help them open up by asking questions like, “How are you doing?” or “What’s going on?”
- Mention specific things that have made you concerned for them, like: “You seem less chatty than usual. How are you doing?”
- If they don’t want to talk, don’t criticize them.
- Tell them you’re still concerned about changes in their behavior and you care about them.
- Avoid a confrontation.
- You could say: “Please call me if you ever want to talk” or “Is there someone else you’d rather talk to?”

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 does that make you feel?” or “How long have you felt that way?”
- Show that you’ve listened by repeating (in your own words) what you’ve heard and ask if you understood them properly.

Encourage Action

- Ask: “What have you done in the past to manage similar situations?”
- Ask: “How would you like me to support you?”
- Ask: “What’s something enjoyable or relaxing you can do for yourself right now?”
- 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 two weeks, encourage them to see a mental health professional. You could say, “It might be useful to connect with someone who can support you. I’m happy to help you find resources.”
- Be positive about the role of professionals in getting through tough times.

Check In

- Set a reminder in your phone 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 doing since we last talked.”
- Ask if they’ve found a better way to manage their stress. If they haven’t done anything, don’t judge them. They might just need someone to listen to them.
- Stay in touch and be there for them. Genuine care and concern can make a real difference.