

HOT

NEWSLETTER
SEPTEMBER
2022

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SPRING IS HERE!

Living with HIV brings multiple issues we have to navigate and maintaining health our health often means communicating with many different health professionals. This can for some of us be a daunting situation building trust and rapport as well as feeling heard in a system with a diverse language of health.

It's bad enough facing this virus but we sadly as we age need to add chronic illnesses to living with HIV list like diabetes, chronic obesity, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, High blood sugars or cholesterol, chronic depression and so on.

It's an important topic to discuss and just as important to understand why, how, and most importantly what can we do about it.

The following article may shed some light on to questions we want answers to in relation to communicating effectively with health care professionals.

We may find ourselves wondering if others living with HIV face this and what was their experience. If anyone wants to share we would welcome your story. See last page to contact...



Enhancing communication with Health care workers

HOW CAN I UNDERSTAND MY DOCTOR BETTER AND BE HEARD?

Health Issues Centre in Victoria recently met with a group of passionate consumers and discussed how to address the issues affecting two-way communication between consumers and health professionals. At this session HIC presented on how consumers can better prepare to make the most of healthcare visits. The participants fed back that they found this information very useful, so we decided to share it with you too.

Evidence based health information online

Living with HIV we can find ourselves navigating across many health professionals as we deal with multiple co-morbidities or health issues. Often when a new diagnoses is added our mind races and once our shock calms we go seeking information, this is important but the where we seek that is also important to assure accurate, reliable health information.

To feel confident about managing your health condition you need to be well informed. However it is better NOT to just do a “Google search” because the information you might encounter can be of variable quality. There are several well-known, reliable, and trustworthy web sites where consumers can go to find correct health information. These include:

- [Health Direct](#)
- [MyDr](#)
- [Better Health Channel](#)
- [Medicine Wise – National Prescribing Service](#)
- [The Cochrane Library](#)
- Health information translated – [Victorian](#) and [Federal](#)

One person who attended the session said:

“The [MedicineWise app](#) sounds like a handy way to keep track of medicines for when you’re attending appointments!”

Checking that health information online is reliable

If you, or someone you know DO “Google search” a health condition or medicine, please use [this checklist](#) to make sure that the information is reliable and appropriate for you.

Preparing to visit a medical practitioner

The other thing we discussed at the session was how to prepare before visiting a medical practitioner. There are a few tools to assist consumers to prepare before an appointment. These include:

Question builder

- *Prepare for your medical appointment by creating a list of questions to ask your doctor.*
- *Print or email the list to yourself or a support person so that it is handy to take to your appointment.*
- *This preparation will help you get more out of the time with your doctor and help you to remember everything you want to ask.*

A person who attended the session shared their thoughts on the importance of feeling prepared for a health appointment:

“It would be great if the staff at health services encouraged patients to use resources like ‘Question Builder’. Being from a regional area, I sometimes have to drive 4 hours each way to go to a health appointment, so I need to make the most of my time with the specialist.”

Check-back

‘Check-back’ is an online learning tool to help all consumers understand what is happening in our health appointments, engage with healthcare workers as partners in our own care, and leave with a clear understanding of what happens next.

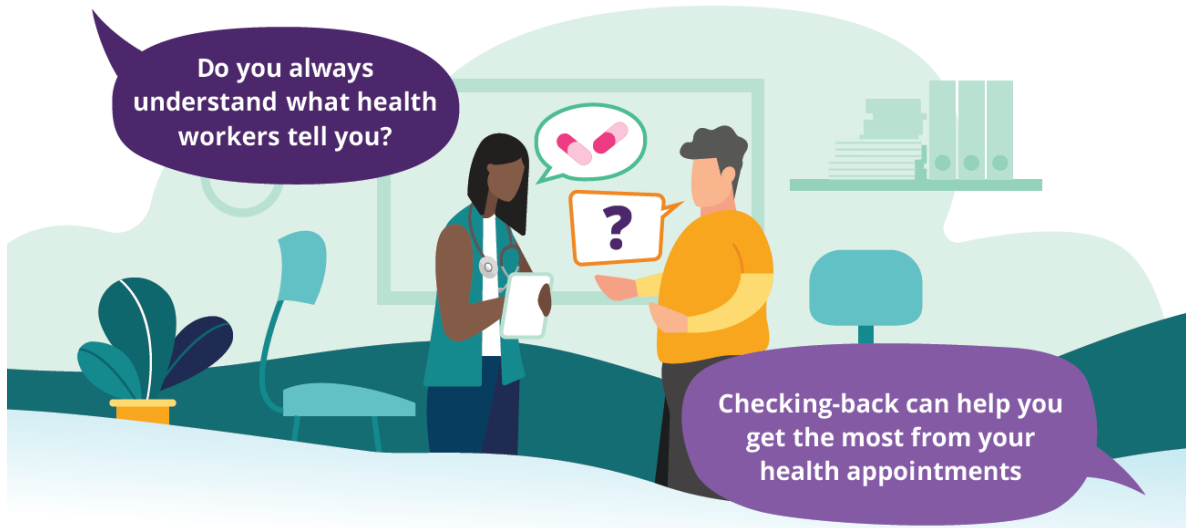
Another attendee reflected that it’s ok to follow up on things you need from your healthcare providers:

“... It’s OK to phone the GP clinic to ask for the referral you forgot to ask for, or email a specialist to check if you need to continue taking the existing medication after being given a script for a new medication.”

According to the dictionary to check-back means: check back is phrasal verb
checked back; checking back; checks back

; To return to a place, person, etc., in order to try something again or to get additional information.

Check-back a welcome tool for health consumers!



We have all been to health care appointments where we left not knowing if we totally understood what the healthcare worker said or what to do next. This can be a major issue because it can have severe consequences on our health outcomes, as well as leaving us feeling like we aren't true partners in our own health care.

This is why **Check-back** has been developed. It's an online learning tool to help all consumers understand what is happening in our health appointments, engage with healthcare workers as partners in our own care, and leave with a clear understanding of what happens next.

It's never silly to ask

At a recent workshop about Check-back one consumer welcomed the new resource saying:

"I really think that we've needed this for a long time. I found it very accessible and it gave me a little bit of confidence because I find it very hard asking doctors to repeat themselves. You feel a bit silly sometimes if you say, "I didn't quite get that", so I thought it was really good."

Another said they wish it had been developed earlier:

"My initial response to Check-back was "Why didn't this exist when I first started seeing doctors for my condition?" I think it's great that this exists, and it's long overdue. It also came across as simple enough for most people to understand without feeling condescended. It addressed common barriers with practical advice that most people can operate."

How does Check-back work?

Check-back is a simple online e-learning module that takes about 15 minutes to complete. It's self-guided and has a range of videos, audio clips and text that you work through to understand how it works.

There are sections where you select options relating to your needs which will generate personalised documents that you can use during your healthcare appointments.

It's completely free and anonymous to use, you don't need to register and you can save your documents to use in the future.

Why not try it today. <https://checkback.org/start-checkback/>

When might you use Check-back?

Check-back is a good option anytime you are going to see a healthcare worker, depending on your needs you can use any of the tools, conversation cues or strategies to make your experience easier.

One of our workshop attendees thought it might be particularly useful when seeing a healthcare worker for the first time and when stressful interactions might happen.

"I'd be more likely to use it with new health professionals and in stressful situations. If I'm seeing my GP who I know really well, he already knows to check with me that I understand everything. However, the first few sessions with an oncologist when you're reeling from what you've just been told, and your mind just goes blank, that's when Check-back helps."

What do you imagine to be the impacts of using Check-back?

We asked consumers how they felt Check-back could make a difference in the lives of consumers.

One person shared that:

"I think it could be a positive in that it allows a little bit more of a conversation between you and the doctor, rather than just the doctor dictating the conversation. By you paraphrasing and checking back it can open more of a dialogue and it gives you a sense of control."

Another said

"I think for a lot of people using Check-back could be quite anxiety inducing at first, because they've never done it before, it might be a really unfamiliar concept. But as they ask more and more in real life, in different settings, their confidence could increase and they might feel more to feel like active participants in their healthcare."

Spreading the word

Do you know someone that you think would benefit from using Check-back in their health journey? Why not share the module with them?

Do you support consumers in enhancing their independence or health literacy skills? Why not go through the module together?

Together we can ensure more consumers feel empowered and confident in managing their health.

How was Check-back developed?

Check-back was developed as a collaboration between Monash University, Safer Care Victoria, Northern Health, Ballarat Health Services and Monash Health.

Check-back is the product of an extensive co-design process which sought to understand how [Teach-back](https://teach-back.org/) <https://teach-back.org/>, a health-literacy communication approach targeted at health workers, could be initiated by consumers. Consumers involved in the development of Teach-back said they wanted to be more involved in actively communicating with clinicians, suggesting that this would

- Increase their ability to act on health information
- Promote equal partnerships with clinicians

If you would like more information about Check-back or are interested in being involved in helping Check-back reach more people, please contact Alison Beauchamp Senior Research Fellow, School of Rural Health, Monash University at alison.beauchamp@monash.edu

Unite every day, ask are U OK?



Thursday 8th September marks R U OK? Day, a national day built around starting a meaningful conversation with a friend, family member or colleague about their mental health, and spotting the signs in someone you know that may be struggling with life.

The entire conversation starts with a simple question: “Are you okay?” Why is asking 'are you ok?' so important? Poor mental health in Australia is perhaps more prominent now than it has ever been — especially following the last few years and the current world we live in.

According to the Department of Health and Aged Care, at least 1 in 2 Australians will face mental health issues at some point in their lives. This is impacting a growing suicide rate which, over the last decade, has increased for males from 16.2 deaths per 100,000 population in 2011 to 18.6 in 2020. Statistics for females are also up, from 5.1 deaths per 100,000 population in 2011 to 5.8 in 2020.

R U OK? Is calling on members of our LGBTQI+ communities and their allies to Unite every day and ask R U OK?

Everyone goes through tough times in life when we need support and our LGBTQI+ friends sometimes have to deal with added challenges. An R U OK? Conversation can make a difference when someone is struggling and you don't have to be an expert to show your genuine care.

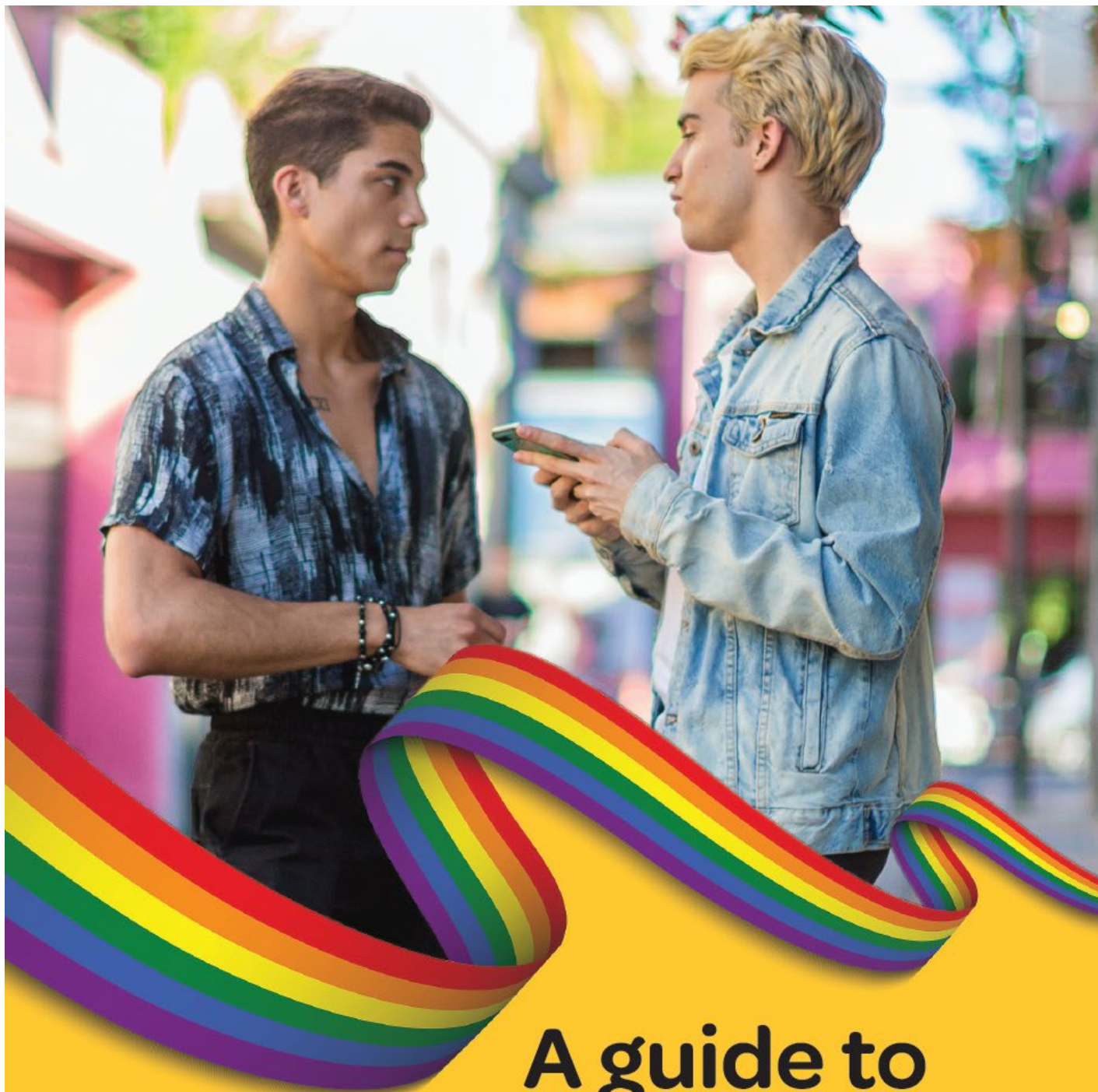
Those who are lesbian, gay, bi, trans/transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTQI+) and sexuality, gender and bodily diverse might be subject to minority stress, prejudice, discrimination, violence or abuse. These factors mean LGBTQI+ people can be more likely to experience depression and anxiety and be at risk of self-harm and suicide.

We can all play a role in supporting our friends by being a safe, welcoming space for them to turn to for support and for you to genuinely engage with them in an R U OK? conversation. It is important these conversations happen whenever we spot the signs someone in our world might be struggling.

Although most lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTQI+) Australians live health and happy lives, research has shown that a disproportionate number experience poorer mental health outcomes and have higher risk of suicidal behaviours than their peers. These health outcomes are directly related to experiences of stigma, prejudice, discrimination and abuse on the basis of being LGBTQI+.

According to a 2020 study by LGBTQI Australia:

- LGBTQI+ youth are five times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers.
- 16 percent of LGBTQI+ youth have attempted suicide compared to 3,2 percent of non LGBTQI+ youth in the same age bracket
- 48.1 percent of Transgender and gender diverse people aged 14 to 25 have attempted suicide in their lifetime.
- 77.6 percent of bisexual people aged 18 and over reported having thoughts of suicide in their lifetime
- 50 percent of people with an intersex variation aged 16 and over have had thoughts of suicide on the basis of issues related to having congenital sex variations.



A guide to
asking **RUOK?**

ruok.org.au





This resource contains tips to help you know when and how to have a conversation with someone who may be lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender, intersex, queer (LGBTIQ+), and other sexuality, gender and bodily diverse people including First Nations brotherboys and sistergirls. When we use 'LGBTIQ+' we are also talking more broadly about people with diverse bodies, sexualities and genders.

The contents of this booklet have been developed in consultation with LGBTIQ+ Health Australia.

How conversations can make a difference

Life can be challenging, and we all need support during times of stress, grief, loss, relationship breakdown and when we're under work or financial pressure. For LGBTIQ+ people, they may also experience instances of prejudice, stigma, and discrimination that others do not. Some of these may include:

- Homophobic, biphobic, transphobic, and/or intersexphobic attitudes in others
- Pressure to conform to heterosexual or cisgender standards and in some cases active attempts to 'convert' them out of their identity status
- Trauma and psychological distress as a result of involuntary or coerced medical interventions
- Bullying and intimidation in the workplace or at school
- Rejection from family and friends
- Stress that builds up over time due to feeling different or from being 'on your guard' all the time.
- Acts of public aggression and/or violence in the home based on their sexual orientation or gender identity
- Rejection from places of worship or exclusion from other community groups (such as sporting teams)

The support of friends, family, peers and allies can make a difference when someone is dealing with challenges like these and life's ups and downs. A simple way to provide support is by starting an R U OK? conversation.

This guide contains tips to help you feel confident you can have a conversation with someone you're worried about.

Brotherboys, sistergirls and other LGBT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience a number of significant and intersecting points of discrimination and marginalisation. Visit ruok.org.au/strongertogether for additional resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.



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 a bit of 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
- Lacking self-esteem
- Concerned they're trapped or in pain
- Like they feel their friends and family aren't supportive
- Like they feel lonely, don't belong or that they don't fit in
- Like they're struggling to find their tribe or community





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

WHAT ARE THEY

DOING

Are they:

- Experiencing confusion about their identity
- Experiencing mood swings
- Self-medicating or self-harming
- Engaging in risk taking behaviours
- Unable to concentrate
- Losing interest in what they used to love
- Less interested in their appearance and personal hygiene
- Changing their sleep patterns

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THEIR

LIFE

Have they experienced:

- Violence, trauma or harassment
- Injury or illness
- A major change
- Have they recently 'come out' or are considering it
- Relationship issues
- Constant stress
- Financial difficulty
- Loss of or alienation from someone or something they care about



“We need to not only be able to ask are you OK? but also feel like there are people we can tell when we’re not OK.”

Steven

Getting ready to start an R U OK? conversation



Ask yourself

- Are you in a good headspace?
- Are you willing to genuinely listen?
- Can you give as much time as needed?
- Are you the best person to have the conversation or is there someone else in their support network that you should encourage to reach out to them?



Be prepared

- Remember 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 it can be difficult and they might become emotional, defensive, embarrassed or upset
- Have you considered how past experiences could affect their reaction in the conversation? E.g they may not want to talk about it or they may have concerns with trust
- Have you researched what appropriate support is available for the person you're talking to?
- Have you thought about the language you're using? You can find tips and information on language at www.lgbtiqhealth.org.au/inclusive_language_guide



Pick your moment

- Have you chosen somewhere relatively private and informal where they'll feel safe?
- What time will be good for them to chat? Ideally try and put aside 30 minutes so the conversation isn't rushed
- If they can't talk when you approach them, suggest another time to have the conversation
- Consider whether it might be more comfortable for the person to talk to you online or side-by-side with you e.g. walking together rather than face-to-face

4 steps to an R U OK? conversation:



1. Ask R U OK?

- Be relaxed
- Help them open up by asking questions like "How are you going?", "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 "I've noticed you saying you don't feel supported. How are you going?"
- If they don't want to talk, let them know that you care and that you're available whenever they need a listening ear. You could say, "I'm always here but is there someone else you'd be comfortable talking to?"

"We need to create spaces for people to tell their story and their experience quite openly and broadly, without judgement."

Jacinta



“Their support has helped me love myself and be proud of who I am.”
Elvis



2. Listen with an open mind

- Emphasise that you’re here to listen not judge
- 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
- Encourage them to explain what’s going on: “Have you been feeling this way for a while?”, “It sounds like that would be really tough. How are you going with managing it?”, “So, what was that like?” or “What’s been happening?”
- Don’t make assumptions or apply unprompted labels or conclusions about their identity
- If they get angry or upset, stay calm and don’t take it personally
- Let them know you’re asking because you’re concerned about them



3. Encourage action

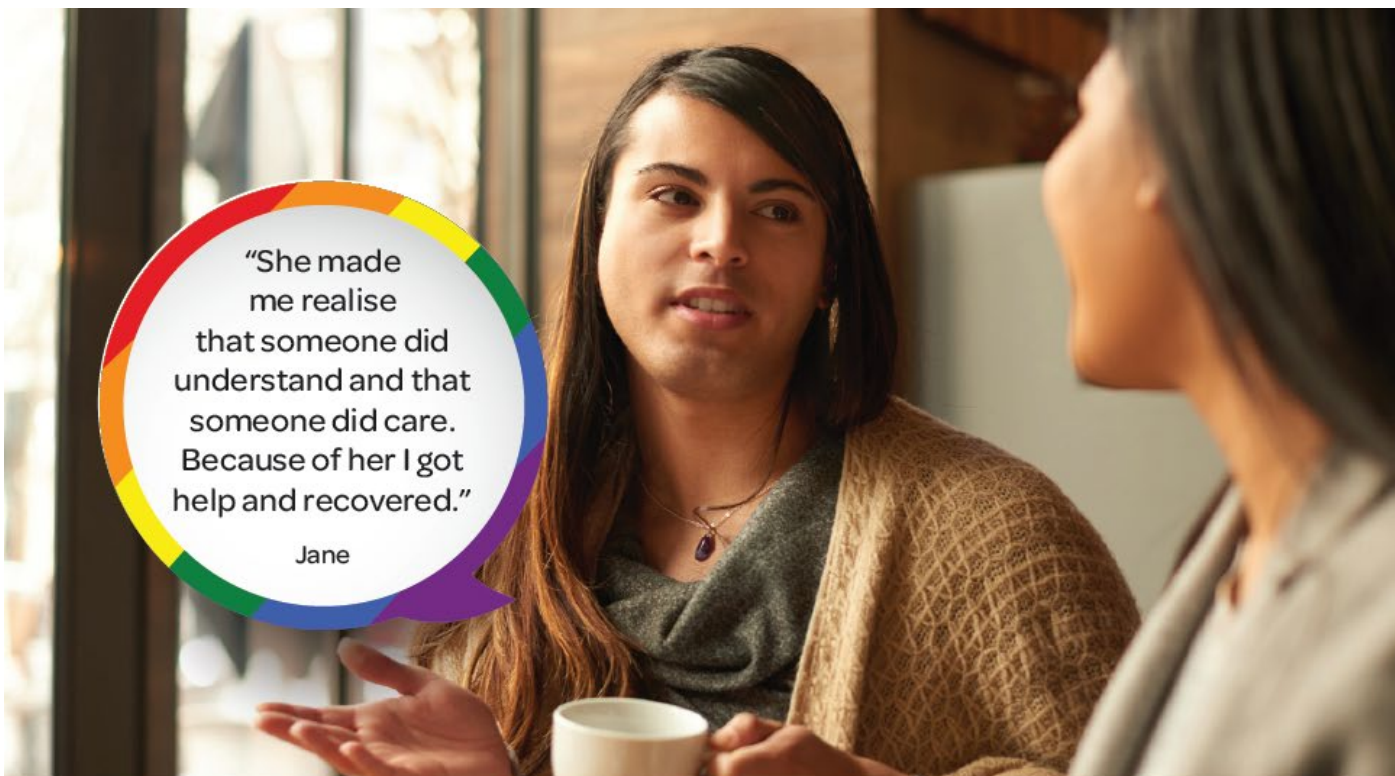
- Ask: "Where do you think we can go from here?"
- Ask: "What would be a good first step we can take?"
- Ask: "What do you need from me? How can I help?"
- You could ask, "Do you think it would be useful if we look into finding some professional or other support?"
- Good options for action might include talking to family, a trusted friend, an appropriate health professional or LGBTIQ+ services, like QLife



4. Check in

- Remember to check in and see how the person is doing in a few days' time
- Ask how they're coping with the situation or feelings and if they need support to manage it
- If they haven't done anything, keep encouraging them and remind them you're always here if they need a chat
- Understand that sometimes it can take a long time for someone to be ready to see a professional for support
- Try to reinforce the benefits of seeking professional help and trying different avenues





“She made me realise that someone did understand and that someone did care. Because of her I got help and recovered.”

Jane

Useful contacts for someone who's not OK

Encourage them to call on a trusted health professional or these Australian crisis lines and professionals:

QLife (3pm-midnight)

1800 184 527

qlife.org.au

Lifeline

13 11 14

lifeline.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service (24/7)

1300 659 467

suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Beyond Blue (24/7)

1300 224 636

beyondblue.org.au

SANE Australia:

1800 18 SANE (7263)

sane.org

More contacts:

ruok.org.au/findhelp

RU OK?™

A conversation could change a life.

ruok.org.au



RU OK? celebrates the strength, resilience and diversity of lesbian, gay, bi, trans, intersex, queer, and other sexuality, gender and bodily diverse people and communities.

I hope you enjoyed this Newsletter. I would love to hear from writers or aspiring writers who may want to add to the newsletter.

This is your space and we welcome your contributions!

We are also looking at a monthly drop in morning nearby to Oxford St so keep posted for this news soon!
We really want to meet you and have you meet us the

HOT consumer advisory committee.



Lifeline 13 11 14

Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636

Headspace 1800 650 890

Men's line Australia 1300 789 978

Multicultural Mental Health 1300 726 289

Crisis Care (Counselling, accommodation & food) 9223 1111

Feel free to call these agencies to talk or be referred for emergency assistance. HOT will be available over the holiday period to call also.

WORD FROM OUR CONSUMER ADVISORY GROUP

“We are looking at setting up a coffee morning soon so watch this space!”

WE CAN DO THIS TOGETHER, STAY SAFE

We acknowledge the traditional custodians
of the land on which we live and work and
pay our respects to the elders past and present.



