

## How to ask Are You OK? And why it is important

You get the feeling that one of your colleagues isn't behaving as they normally would. He appears to be irritated and withdrawn and has stop sharing morning tea with everyone. He is normally a happy go lucky person who loves sharing his breaks with his colleagues.

You see this person at his desk and his hands are in his head. What do you do? Do you think he will be okay again or do you ask, "Are you okay?"

Often people are afraid to ask because they don't know how to help and fear the answer.

What if he said "No, I'm not okay." What would you say then?

What if he answers, "I don't want to talk about it, but I'm not okay." What do you answer?

### 1. ASK

Take the lead, show initiative, and ask, "Are you okay?"

Use simple questions like, "How are you going?" Or, "What's been happening? I've noticed you seem a bit flat lately."

Mention specific things that you've been concerned about, like, "You don't seem to be your bubbly self lately."

Use open-ended questions such as, "So tell me about ..."

This requires more than a yes or no answer and allows the conversation to open up.

### 2. LISTEN

At this point, listen. I mean, really listen!

Suspend all judgment. Don't be thinking what you will say next. Make eye contact and let them know that you are really there for them. Let them speak without interrupting. Avoid giving advice or telling them what they should or should not do. Don't say things like, "It's really not that bad. Time will sort this out." Show them you genuinely care. Take their feelings seriously. Say things like, "What would help to take the pressure off you? How can I support you?"

Paraphrasing is a useful skill in that it ensures you understand what the person is telling you.....

“So, what you are saying is you are under extreme pressure to meet deadlines at work and it is causing you anxiety, you are not spending any time with your family and you feel extremely stressed and sad”.

### 3. Show them you are genuine in your concern

Don't shrug it off as having a bad time of it all or forget what they told you.

**Be real – be transparent with them** and take their feelings seriously. And unless you are seriously concerned about suicide maintain their confidentiality at all times. It is for them to decide who they speak to, not us.

### 4. Offer Support

Ask question like what would help take the pressure off you?

“How can I support you?”

If they have been feeling really down for more than a couple of weeks, encourage them to seek professional help.

#### *You could say:*

“I really don't like seeing you struggling on your own. There are people that can help”.

“Have you thought of visiting your doctor?”

Don't assume that the problem will just go away!

Don't suggest going to the pub for a drink or two!

Don't tell them to keep busy!

Do tell them you are genuinely and unconditionally here to support them.

### 5. Check in

Ask – “What are you plans for tonight? Can we again chat tomorrow, would that be ok with you?”

These are the strategies for talking to someone when you believe they are not okay. It is really important just not to bury our heads in the sand and think they will be fine.

Find out how that person's really doing. If there is nothing wrong then nothing is lost, if there is something wrong there is a lot to gain.

**One conversation could just save a life.**