

HEALTHWISE

# How to ask “**Are you okay?**” at work

GUIDE FOR LEADERS

# A Practical Guide for the Workplace

## **Content Expertise**

This resource was developed with guidance from mental health professionals to help build supportive and resilient workplaces.

## **Why use this?**

This guide offers practical steps for asking, “Are you OK?” to a team member or colleague you’re concerned about, along with ways to respond compassionately and appropriately if they say, “No, I’m not OK.”

## **What's in the Guide?**

Simple, practical tools to help you:

1. Recognize when someone may need support
2. Use effective steps to approach a colleague who may be struggling
3. Handle emotional reactions during the conversation
4. Access useful contacts for a colleague who needs further support

# Recognizing When Someone Might Need Support

Over the last few weeks, have you noticed two or more of these changes?

## 1. Changes in Physical Appearance

- Look more tired than usual
- Seem “flat” or low on energy
- Eating much more or much less than usual
- Frequently ill or constantly run-down
- Increased alcohol use
- Complaints of physical issues like headaches or migraines
- Seem more fidgety or nervous

## 2. Changes in Mood

- More irritable, snappy, or reactive than usual
- Increased worry or anxiety
- Overwhelmed by tasks that used to be manageable
- Emotional reactions that don’t match the situation
- Quick to anger

## 3. Changes in Behavior

- More withdrawn
- Losing interest in hobbies or activities
- Not meeting their usual work standards
- Trouble concentrating or easily distracted
- Taking on extra work to avoid social situations

## 4. Changes in How They Express Thoughts

- Focuses on the negative: “It’s always terrible...”
- Assumes the worst, e.g., imagining others discussing them negatively
- Says they have trouble “switching off”
- Personalizes situations, e.g., “I knew I’d get the toughest shift—they have it out for me”
- Expresses confusion or irrational thinking

**If you've noticed two or more of these changes, they might benefit from extra support.**

# Simple Steps to Talk to a Staff Member Who’s Not Okay

## Getting Ready to Ask

### 1. Be Ready

- Are you in a calm headspace?
- Are you open to listening fully?
- Do you have time to offer?

### 2. Be Prepared

- Understand that you might not have all the answers—and that’s okay.
- Listening is one of the most valuable things you can do.
- Be ready for the possibility of them becoming emotional.

### 3. Pick Your Moment

- Find a private, relaxed setting.
- Choose a good time to talk; ideally, set aside about an hour for an open conversation.
- If now isn’t a good time for them, ask when would work better.

## Starting the Conversation - "ALEC"

### 1. Ask “Are You Okay?”

- Stay calm and open.
- Are you open to listening fully?
- Do you have time to offer?

### 2. Listen

- Take what they say seriously.
- Don’t rush or interrupt.
- Let them have time to think, even if there are silences.
- Assure them you’re asking because you care.

### 3. Encourage Action

- Ask, “What do you think would be helpful right now?”
- Offer, “What’s a good first step we can take together?”
- Possible actions: talking to family, a friend, a healthcare provider, or using the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

#### 4. Check In

- Follow up in a few days to see how they’re doing.
- If they haven’t taken any steps, gently encourage them and remind them you’re there.
- Reinforce the value of professional help or alternative support, like, “Would it help to explore some professional resources together?”

## Managing Emotional Reactions in a Conversation

Sometimes, supporting someone means encountering strong emotions. Here are ways to navigate them:

### Be Prepared

- Understand that emotions may be about various life issues, not just work.
- Let them express their feelings and actively listen.
- Deal with the emotions first before trying to problem-solve.
- Stay calm; avoid taking things personally.

### Handling Specific Emotions

- **Anger:** Try “I can see this has really affected you. Let’s go through it step-by-step.”
- **Anxiety:** Use calm, brief statements, such as, “I’m here, and I want to help however I can.”
- **Sadness:** Empathize with phrases like, “That sounds really tough.” Allow pauses, and if they cry, stay quietly with them.

## Useful Contacts for Someone Who’s Not OK

Encourage them to consider these crisis lines and professional supports available in Canada and the U.S.

### Canada

- **Wellness Together Canada:** 1-866-585-0445
- **Crisis Services Canada:** 1-833-456-4566 (24/7)
- **Kids Help Phone** (for young adults): 1-800-668-6868
- Canadians can call or text 9-8-8 to access bilingual, trauma-informed, and culturally appropriate mental health and suicide prevention support. The service is free and can be accessed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

### United States

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)
- **Crisis Text Line:** Text HOME to 741741
- **SAMHSA’s National Helpline:** 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)
- **988:** Call or text 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, or chat with someone at 988lifeline.org

### Other Resources

**Employee Assistance Program (EAP):** pop these numbers into your cell phone so you can share them if you need to.

- **EAP CANADA:** Call TELUS (through Manulife) toll-free: 1-844-505-6240
- **EAP USA:** Health Advocate: Call 866-799-2728

**Human Resources:** Contact your HR/People & Culture team:

- **CANADA:** human.resources@flightcentre.ca
- **USA:** HumanResources@us.flightcentre.com

### Mental Well-Being Toolkit

There are some great resources here that you could look at together or pass along including our “Tools to Support Yourself” section, with nutrition, stress & burnout resources, sleep info, on demand meditations, self-care tips, training programs, self-led mental health & stress management courses, the Healthwise “Encouraging the Conversation” podcast and more.

[Discover more here.](#)

**Any other local numbers you would like to add to this guide:**

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