

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

Mental Health & Wellbeing

> **Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy**

> **Mental Health & Wellbeing resources**

> **The Mental Health and Wellbeing Team**

> **Collaboration and Initiatives**

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Supporting a friend with their mental health

It's normal for everyone to experience ups and downs, but sometimes you might notice that a friend seems to be having a tough time or not acting the way they usually do. You might want to provide support, but it can be easy to feel like you're not sure about what to say or do to help them. It's worth reaching out, though- even a small gesture can make a big difference to someone else.

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About supporting a friend with their mental health

What are the signs that a friend might need support?

The [R U OK website](#) talks about some of the signs that a friend might be struggling:

What are they saying? Do they seem:

- Confused or irrational
- Moody
- Unable to switch off
- Concerned about the future
- Concerned they're a burden
- Lonely or lacking self-esteem
- Concerned they're trapped or in pain

What are they doing? Are they:

- Experiencing mood swings
- Becoming withdrawn
- Changing their online behaviour
- Losing interest in what they used to love
- Unable to concentrate
- Less interested in their appearance and personal hygiene
- Behaving recklessly
- Changing their sleep patterns

What's going on in their life? Are they experiencing:

- Relationship issues
- Major health issues
- Work pressure or constant stress
- Financial difficulty
- Loss of someone or something they care about

Some other signs [specific to university](#) might include:

- If a friend isn't turning on their camera in class or joining in during class when they usually would
- If they aren't coming to class when they usually would or are withdrawing from university life

Being safe

If you have immediate concerns about your friend's safety, call 000 and get advice- don't wait for them to give you permission to call.

It's also important to make sure that you're in the right headspace yourself before providing support, and that you're not putting yourself at risk of experiencing mental health difficulties as a result of the support you provide. If you're not in the right place to have a conversation, try to think of someone else they know who might be able to provide the support instead.

Strategies for providing support

Getting prepared

Before you chat, make sure you're prepared:

- Is it a good time? Is there enough time for a conversation?
- Have you thought about the best way to have the conversation- in person, over the phone, via messaging apps?
- If you're together in person, are you in a location that's reasonably comfortable and private?
- Are you feeling ready to genuinely listen?

Have a conversation

[R U OK](#) has a guide on the four steps to checking in on someone:

- **Ask if they're ok**
 - Be relaxed, friendly and concerned in your approach
 - Ask open questions to help them open up.
 - [Some examples](#) of things you could say might include:

"Hey, I've noticed you don't seem to be yourself lately?
Just checking that everything is ok?"

"You seem a little more distracted than normal. Is there anything that is taking your focus that I can help you with?"

"I haven't seen you hanging out with your friends lately?
Is everything ok there?"

"I've noticed you haven't had a lot to say in tutorials lately.
That's not like you. Is everything ok?"

- If they don't want to talk, that's ok- let them know you're still concerned and you care about them and that they're welcome to talk when they're ready, or ask if there's another person they'd rather chat with.
- **Listen with an open mind**
 - Give them time and space to talk or think- don't interrupt or rush them.
 - Don't judge what they say- acknowledge that things seem tough for them.
 - Encourage them to explain: for instance, "How are you feeling about that?", or "How long have you felt like that?"
- **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 you can do for yourself right now? Something that's enjoyable or relaxing?"
 - If they've been feeling really down for more than two weeks, encourage them to see a health professional. You could say, "It might be useful to link in with someone who can support you. I'm happy to assist you to find the right person to talk to."
 - You could suggest that they book in with the WSU Counselling Service, encourage them to book an appointment with their GP, or encourage them to call a service like Lifeline- see the University Support and Community Support sections below for resources you could help them access.
- **Check in**
 - Put a reminder in your diary to check back in with them in a few weeks, or sooner if they're really struggling.
 - Ask how they're going and if they've found a better way to manage the situation. If they haven't done anything, don't judge them.
 - Stay in touch and be there for them. Genuine care and concern can make a real difference.

University support

If you or someone you know is having difficulties or would like some support, the WSU [Counselling Service](#), [Disability Service](#), or [Student Welfare Service](#) may be able to help.

- **WSU [Counselling Service](#).**

Students can access free, short term, confidential counselling services. Face to face, Zoom or phone appointments can be made by telephoning 1300 668 370. Our office hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am - 4:30pm. Alternatively, or email counselling@westernsydney.edu.au

- **WSU [Disability Service](#).**

The Disability Service is free to access with Disability Advisors assisting students to meet their full potential. If you have a diagnosed physical, psychological or medical condition that impacts on your studies, you may be eligible for an [Academic Integration Plan \(AIP\)](#), developed by the Disability Service. Contact the Disability Service on 1300 668 370, email disability@westernsydney.edu.au or make contact via [WesternNow](#).

- **WSU [Welfare Service](#).**

Academic, Personal and Financial Hardship, International Support and Accommodation: 1300 668 370 or via [WesternNow](#).

- **Multifaith [Chaplaincy](#)**

Multifaith Chaplaincy can provide confidential conversation and care, support for stress management and anxiety with links to religious groups and faith communities. For more information, please call Daniel Jantos on 0402771543 or email d.jantos@westernsydney.edu.au.

- **WesternLife**

[WesternLife](#) - Join thousands of students at Your Virtual Community to share experiences, learn new things, connect with new friends, and engage with events or discussions that interest you!

- **Disruption to Studies**

Consider applying for [Disruption to Studies](#) and [Requests for Extension](#) if you feel as though your studies have been significantly impacted.

- **Deferred Exams**

[Deferred Exam](#) – You can apply for a Deferred Exam no later than 5.00 pm on the second working day after your scheduled exam if you are unable to attend a final exam due to serious illness, misadventure or other exceptional circumstances beyond your control. Submit a [Student Form](#) and attach supporting documents online for application.

- **Withdrawal Without Academic Penalty**

[Withdrawal Without Academic Penalty](#) is an option available after the Census Date of the teaching term provided that you meet eligibility.

- **Leave of Absence**

A [Leave of Absence](#) is a temporary break from studying. Once you have completed one or more subjects in your enrolled program, you can apply for a Leave of Absence. A Leave of Absence can be taken as either six or twelve months. The maximum amount of leave you can take during your program is twelve months. Please note, you must submit your application before the relevant census date

If you are considering any of these options, please reach out to the counselling service for support and guidance. If you are an international student, please make sure you seek advice particularly if you are considering withdrawing without penalty or taking a leave of absence as these may have [implications for your visa conditions](#).

Community support

- [Lifeline](#)

Lifeline (24 hours crisis counselling) - **13 11 14**

Lifeline SMS Counselling Service - between 6pm- Midnight you can text **0477 13 11 14** and somebody will text you back! You can find more information [here](#).

- [Mental Health Telephone Access Line](#)

Available 24/7 to everyone in NSW on **1800 011 511**. Provides professional help and advice and referrals to local mental health services.

- **Reach Out – Helping someone else**

This website ([Reach Out](#)) provides resources, information and factsheets for wellbeing and mental health as well as caring for others.

- **Supporting Family and Friends with a Mental Health Condition Forum – Beyond Blue**

A moderated, online peer support forum space for sharing tips on supporting a partner, family member or friend with a mental health condition and seeking help for your own wellbeing.

<https://forums.beyondblue.org.au/t5/supporting-family-and-friends/bd-p/c1-sc3-b4>

- **SANE Forums**

Seek help, make connections, and share your experience. The SANE Forums are an online community for people affected by mental illness. It's a safe, stigma-free, supportive, and anonymous peer support community, moderated 24/7 by mental health professionals.

<https://saneforums.org/t5/Friends-Family-Carers-Forum/ct-p/carers-forum>

- **Headspace – Helping A Friend**

Head space provides information and advice on how to help a friend who is experiencing difficult times.

<https://headspace.org.au/explore-topics/for-young-people/help-a-friend/>

- **RUOK? – How to Support someone and ask R U OK?**

On the [RUOK](#) website you can find practical tips and advice on the signs someone might be struggling, how to have a conversation with them and connect them to support.

- **Beyond Blue**

[Beyond Blue](#) is a 24/7 service that provides information and support to everyone. You can call them on 1300 22 4636 or chat online.

- **QLife**

LGBTI peer support and referral. Contact them on **1800 184 527** (6pm-10pm daily) or you can chat online <https://qlife.org.au/> (online chat 3pm-12am daily)

- **Mensline Australia**

[Mensline](#) is a 24/7 counselling service for men. You can contact them on **1300 78 99 78**

- **Project air**

Project air was developed by the University of Wollongong Australia. It has developed a range of resources to assist people who may need help. <https://www.uow.edu.au/project-air/helping-others/>

Resources

- [Websites](#)
- [Podcasts](#)

- [Videos](#)
- [Apps](#)

Websites

[Headspace- How to help a friend going through a tough time](#)

[Black Dog Institute- Helping someone else](#)

[Beyond Blue- Guiding their way back: A resource for people who are supporting someone after a suicide attempt](#)

The **Real Talk framework** is a conversational approach to supporting mental health and wellbeing in universities. This [Real Talk Fact Sheet](#) helps you what to notice, how to inquire and how to provide support when you are concerned about the mental health of someone you know.

Take a look at this [Real Talk Report](#) which provides information for supporting someone you know having difficulty with their mental health.

Podcasts

“How to Support Your Friend’s Mental Health”

This episode talks about mental health and how to support your friends. The Optimal Living Daily podcast is hosted by clinical psychologist Sara Stanizai.

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/3NBSte4saNUlxBVPsjWuSY?si=JHf0c7sASU2RWWsy9-YU7g>

“Lets Talk About...Supporting Others”

This episode is one of the Let’s Talk About Mental Health podcast. This episode talks about healthy ways to provide support for others, even if you yourself have mental health challenges.

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/0ubeqKLzra1gA1uhboS83o?si=H9iA6t-4QAmLiv94j4iIBA>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/za/podcast/lets-talk-about-supporting-others/id1484984752?i=1000521885035>

Videos

[Dr Alex George on how to spot when a friend needs support with their mental wellbeing](#)

['I'll be there for you': Helping a friend who's struggling \(Like Minds Ep1\) BBC Stories](#)

[Help a Friend with Active Listening | Mental Health Peer Support](#)

Apps

[Check-in](#): This app was created by Beyond Blue and is designed for anyone wanting to check in with a friend and is easy and quick to use.

[Smiling Mind](#): A free, evidence-based mindfulness and meditation app. Mindfulness meditation has been shown to help manage stress, resilience, anxiety, depression and improve general health and wellbeing.

Still struggling?

If you are still struggling, reach out to the WSU counselling team for support and advice. If you prefer to seek support from a service outside of the university, it may be helpful to speak to your General Practitioner regarding a [Mental Health Care Plan](#) and referral to a psychologist, or you can speak to a counsellor or other health professional.

Please find the attached PDF document [here](#).

References

[Headspace – Helping a Friend](#)

[RUOK – How to Ask](#)

[Black Dog Institute – Helping someone else](#)