



HEALTH & GENDER
AFFIRMATION IN NSW

10 ways to reach out when you're struggling with your mental health

The importance of 'reaching out' comes up a lot when talking about mental health, and looking after ourselves. It's something that can be easier said than done though since asking for help and holding space for our mates isn't something many of us are taught. Reaching out is a skill we need to learn and practice, rather than something we're automatically just able to do. These skills are particularly important to learn as trans people, we know that community connection can keep us strong and resilient.

When we talk about reaching out, what does this mean though, and what are we asking people to do or say? This guide offers examples you can use when reaching out, and where to go from there.

While it's important to be respectful of people's capacities and boundaries (and be prepared, of course, if someone can't be there for you or isn't helpful — it's not personal!), you might be surprised by the responses that you get.

This guide also talks about depression, anxiety, ideation, and suicide. If you're having a rough time, make sure you have some support available before reading, or go to the last page for a list of support services.

1. "Can you check in with me (on date/every day), just to make sure I'm alright?"

Never underestimate the value of asking for a check-in. This is an excellent coping skill because it can be super helpful for everyone involved to have something practical to do, and look forward to.

If you take nothing else away from this guide, it should be this: Please ask people to check in with you. It's such a small thing to ask for in the age of texting, but it can help us stay connected, which is critical for our mental health and wellbeing.

And this can happen in so many smart ways. A few of our favorites:



HEALTH & GENDER
AFFIRMATION IN NSW

"I haven't been doing well. Can you text me every morning to make sure I'm okay? It would really help me."

"Hey friend. I've been kind of sad lately — do you maybe want to send selfies to each other before bed every night, just to check in? It'd be nice to see your face."

"I'm in a funk right now. Do you want to be self-care buddies? Like text each other once a day something that we did to care for ourselves?"

"I've been isolating myself a little lately. Can you check in with me every so often, just to make sure I didn't fall off the face of the earth?"

Adding emojis can help it to feel more casual if it feels scary to ask someone directly, but really, you don't need to, and there's nothing wrong with asking for what you need.

Asking for people to check in with you when you're struggling is just like buckling up your seatbelt when you get in a car. It's one extra safety measure in case things get rough.

2. "I'm (depressed/anxious/suicidal). I'm not sure what to ask for, but I don't want to be alone right now. Could we have a phone or video call?"

Sometimes we don't know exactly what we need, or we're unsure of what someone can offer. That's okay; that shouldn't discourage us from reaching out. It's perfectly fine if you have no idea what you need or want — especially when all you can think about is how much you're hurting.

Let someone know how you're feeling. You might be surprised by the ways they offer to support you. And if they aren't helpful? Keep asking until you find someone who is, or seek out a service like QLife for phone or online chat counselling. It can feel weird to

talk to a stranger, but it's also nice to be able to talk to someone who doesn't know you at all, especially if you're feeling anxious about talking to a friend.

3. "I'm struggling with my mental health and what I've been trying isn't working. Can we (meet up/talk on the phone/etc) on (date) and come up with a better plan?"

Feeling helpless or exhausted is a normal part of dealing with a mental health system that can be really hard to navigate. A team approach can really help things feel more manageable though, sometimes we just need a cheerleader or researcher to help us explore our options.

Like many other points in this guide, it's really helpful to set a date and time. Not only does this give you a point in your diary to look forward to, it can also help the person you're talking with to understand the urgency of your request.

4. "I know we don't talk much, but I'm going through a tough time and I feel like you're someone I can trust. Are you free to talk (day/time)?"

Not all of us have people we're close to that we confide in, and so reaching out to people can feel a lot more difficult, or like you're of a burden. You're not a burden though.

Sometimes we can be surprised by the care that people show us, even if they don't know us well, it can create a really valuable connection. If you're struggling to find someone who is able to provide you support, definitely get in touch with a professional, such as a phone service or a counsellor like one of ACON's counselling team (details for accessing these are on the back page).



HEALTH & GENDER
AFFIRMATION IN NSW

5. “I don’t feel safe by myself right now. Can you stay on the phone/video with me until I calm down?”

This is a hard one to say. We often fear telling someone just how much we’re struggling, and admitting that we don’t feel safe is a very vulnerable thing to say. Replace the word “safe” if it’s not working for you but it’s often helpful to be direct since it’s the surest route to get what you need.

When things feel tough, and that voice is telling you it won’t make any difference to reach out, remember, that voice doesn’t always have your best interests at heart, so it can be worthwhile to try and acknowledge it and then put it to the side.

6. “I’m in a bad place, but I’m not ready to talk about it. Can you help me distract myself?”

You do not have to talk about what’s bothering you if you’re not ready.

Opening up a whole can of worms might not be the safest or best thing for you in that particular moment. And guess what? You can still reach out for help.

Sometimes we just need someone to chat with, so we aren’t stuck in our heads. This is a valid and healthy thing to ask for, and it’s a subtle way of making mates aware that you’re having a rough time, without needing to go into detail.

The sooner those around you are aware that you’re having a hard time, the quicker they can show up to help you through it.

Early interventions are so critical for our mental health. In other words: Don’t wait for your whole basement to flood before you fix a leaky pipe — fix the pipe when you notice the problem has started.

7. “I’m having a hard time taking care of myself. I need extra support right now around (task). Can you help?”

Maybe you need help getting to an appointment or the grocery store. Maybe you need a cheerleader to make sure you took your meds, or someone to send a selfie to show you got out of bed that morning. Are your dishes piling up in the sink? Do you need a study buddy? It doesn’t hurt to ask for support around specific tasks.

Sometimes these things add up when we’re struggling, and we forget that it’s okay to ask for a hand, especially during those times when it could really make a difference.

Being an adult is already challenging. If you’re going through a rough time it’s even harder. We all hit a point when we need some extra support. Don’t be afraid to let folks know directly how they could support you.

8. “I’ve been feeling so low. Can you remind me about what I mean to you or share a favorite memory? It would really help me.”

Asking to hear something positive about yourself isn’t “fishing for compliments”. Sometimes we really just need a reminder that we matter.

Sometimes we struggle to recall the good times, and need someone to help us remember them. This is true of every single person on the planet.

It’s such a simple request, too. If you’re the kind of person that feels nervous about making a big ask, this can be a small step in the right direction.



HEALTH & GENDER
AFFIRMATION IN NSW

9. “I’m struggling right now and I’m afraid I’m reaching my limit. Can I give you a call tonight?”

This gets closer to the notion of “raising the alarm”, or letting someone know that you’re in a bad place. Talking so directly about how we’re doing can feel pretty intense, but it’s a really valuable thing to do.

This is true even when we feel like we aren’t at rock bottom yet, or don’t even feel close, because we deserve care no matter how we’re doing.

Listen to that little voice in the back of your mind, the one that’s trying to tell you that you’re a little too close to the edge for comfort. Listen to that nagging feeling that tells you you’re in over your head. That’s your survival instinct — it’s an instinct you should trust and respond to.

10. “I’m suicidal. I need help right now.” or “I feel like I may be at risk of hurting myself”

Raise the alarm right now.

Raise the alarm with friends, and be as direct as you need to be. An emergency is an emergency, whether it’s a heart attack or a self-harm risk. Harm to you in any form is reason enough to ask for help.

There is someone in this world — an old friend or a future one, a family member, a therapist, even a volunteer on a hotline — who wants you to be okay.

Find that person (or people), even if it takes time. Even if you have to keep asking. Give people the chance to help you, you deserve it.

Pick something from this list. Write it down, even if it’s on your hand or a sticky note. Reach out — because now you know how.

If you’re struggling with your mental health, it’s never too soon or too late to let someone know. And it’s never, ever too heavy, too messy, or too much to ask — even if you asked fifty times the day before.

It can be so loaded and big to ask for help, but it’s really an important and powerful thing to learn how to do. We all deserve care, support and love when we’re hurting, including you.



HEALTH & GENDER
AFFIRMATION IN NSW

SUPPORT SERVICES

ACON Counselling services

ACON has a range of counselling services which are able to provide support for people in NSW. ACON's counselling services include:

- LGBTQ Counselling
- Substance support
- Care Coordination
- HIV Counselling
- Sexual, domestic and family violence support
- Pride counselling

You can contact ACON about accessing these services either by calling your nearest ACON Office, or enquiring about making an appointment at aconhealth.org.au/intake_form

CRISIS SERVICES AND HOTLINES

Qlife

3pm to Midnight, 7 days a week

A national private and anonymous phone and online counselling service staffed by LGBTQIA+ community members, with training in crisis management and support for a whole range of sexuality, gender, and totally unrelated issues.

Phone service: 1800 184 527

Lifeline

24 hours, 7 days a week

A national crisis counseling, support and suicide prevention hotline. Lifeline is not LGBTQIA+ specific, but has undergone training with the National LGBTI Health Alliance to be able to best support trans and gender diverse people.

Phone service: 13 11 14

Suicide Callback Service

24 hours, 7 days a week

Suicide Call Back Service is a nationwide service that provides professional 24/7 telephone and online counselling to people who are affected by suicide.

Phone service: 1300 659 467

Mental Health Line

24 hours, 7 days a week

Mental Health Line is a NSW service staffed by mental health professionals who can put you in contact with the most relevant mental health service.

Phone service: 1800 011 511

Beyond Blue

24 hours, 7 days a week

Give us a call any time of the day or night – select from the voice menu or simply hold on the line to talk with a trained mental health professional.

Phone service: 1300 224 636

This resource has been adapted from the article by Sam Dylan Finch on [Let's Queer Things Up](#) with permission, thank you Sam!

This resource uses the terms 'trans', 'transgender' and 'trans & gender diverse' as umbrella terms for a population of people whose gender is different to what was presumed for them at birth and we mean all people of diverse gender experiences, or those who are not cisgender.

For a full glossary, please visit transhub.org.au/language

TransHub is ACON's digital information and resource platform for all trans and gender diverse people in NSW, their loved ones, allies and health providers.

For more information and resources, visit: transhub.org.au

