



# CHECKING IN: A GUIDE TO SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH WITH THE ALEC METHOD

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# INTRODUCTION

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## DISCOVER HOW THE ALEC METHOD —ASK, LISTEN, ENCOURAGE ACTION, CHECK IN—CAN HELP YOU SUPPORT FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES FACING MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES.

In New Zealand, where the breathtaking landscapes and vibrant cultures often paint a picture of a serene and happy life, the reality of mental health challenges can sometimes be overlooked. Despite the country's natural beauty and strong sense of community, many Kiwis struggle silently with mental health issues. The importance of checking in with our mates, whānau, and colleagues cannot be overstated. This simple yet powerful act can make a significant difference in someone's life, potentially steering them away from the brink of despair.

### **The Power of Checking In**

Checking in with someone doesn't require a degree in psychology or a background in counselling. It's about being a caring and supportive friend, family member, or colleague. It's about noticing when someone seems off and taking the time to ask how they are really doing. It's about listening without judgment, encouraging them to take positive steps, and following up to show you care. This can make all the difference to someone struggling with their mental health.

### **A Stark Reality: New Zealand's Mental Health Statistics**

The statistics surrounding mental health in New Zealand are a sobering reminder of why this is so crucial. According to the Ministry of Health, one in five New Zealanders will experience a mental health issue this year. Moreover, the Coroner's Court reported that in 2022, 557 New Zealanders took their own lives. The rates are particularly high among young people and Māori, reflecting deep-seated challenges within our communities.

### **The Role We Can All Play**

Given these numbers, it's clear that mental health issues touch many lives in New Zealand. While professional help is vital, the role that friends, family, and colleagues can play is equally important. Often, the first step towards recovery is simply feeling seen and heard by someone who cares.

This is where the ALEC method comes into play. Developed by the Australian mental health initiative R U OK? and adopted by Movember, ALEC stands for Ask, Listen, Encourage action, and Check in. It's a practical, easy-to-remember framework that anyone can use to support someone in need. You don't have to be an expert; you just have to be there.

### **Why ALEC Matters**

1. Ask: Asking someone how they are doing shows that you care. It opens the door for a conversation that could be lifesaving. It's not about prying but about expressing genuine concern.
2. Listen: Truly listening means giving someone your full attention and letting them share their feelings without interruption or judgment. It can be a cathartic experience for the person sharing.
3. Encourage Action: Encouraging action might mean suggesting they seek professional help, join a support group, or simply take some small steps to improve their well-being. Your encouragement can help them overcome the barriers to seeking help.
4. Check In: Following up after your initial conversation shows ongoing support and reinforces that you are there for them. It helps build a sense of connection and continued care.

In our close-knit New Zealand communities, we often pride ourselves on looking out for one another. Yet, the stigma surrounding mental health can prevent meaningful conversations. By adopting the ALEC method, we can break down these barriers and create a more supportive environment. Whether it's on the rugby field, at the local marae, in the workplace, or around the family dinner table, checking in can help foster resilience and connectedness.

As we navigate through this e-book, you'll gain practical insights and examples on how to effectively check in with your mates using the ALEC method. Together, we can make a positive impact on the mental health and well-being of our communities. Remember, you don't need to be a counselor or psychologist to make a difference. You just need to be there, willing to ask the question and listen with an open heart.

**Let's take this journey together towards a mentally healthier Aotearoa.**



# CHAPTER I

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF CHECKING IN

### **Breaking the silence**

Often, the most challenging step for someone struggling with their mental health is reaching out for help. Feelings of shame, embarrassment, or fear of being judged can prevent individuals from voicing their struggles. By taking the initiative to ask how someone is doing, we can break the silence and create a safe space for them to open up. This simple act of reaching out can be a lifeline, showing the person that they are not alone and that someone cares about their well-being.

In New Zealand, where the culture of "she'll be right" often prevails, it can be particularly difficult for individuals to admit they're struggling and is also not effective! By normalizing conversations about mental health, we can challenge these cultural norms and encourage more openness and vulnerability.

### **The power of connection**

New Zealanders, or Kiwis, are known for their strong sense of community and camaraderie. Whether it's through

sports teams, social clubs, or workplace relationships, Kiwis value their connections. Strong, supportive relationships are vital for our mental and emotional health. When we connect with others, we share our joys and burdens, which can significantly reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness. Checking in with your mates strengthens these bonds, creating a network of support that can make a tangible difference in someone's life.

### **Early Intervention**

Mental health issues, like any health issue, benefit from early intervention. By recognizing the signs of distress early and addressing them, we can prevent the escalation of problems. Regularly checking in with your friends and family can help identify issues before they become more severe. Early support can lead to better outcomes, reducing the risk of long-term consequences such as chronic depression, anxiety disorders, or even suicidal thoughts.

New Zealand has one of the highest

youth suicide rates in the developed world, making early intervention particularly critical. By checking in with young people and providing support, we can help reverse this alarming trend.

### **Promoting a culture of care**

When we routinely check in with each other, we contribute to a culture of care and compassion. This culture encourages open dialogue about mental health, reduces stigma, and promotes understanding. In such an environment, people are more likely to seek help and offer support, leading to a healthier and more resilient community.

In New Zealand, initiatives like the "Like Minds, Like Mine" campaign have been pivotal in changing attitudes towards mental health. By actively engaging in these conversations, we help promote these positive changes and build a more inclusive society.

### **Personal growth and empathy**

Engaging in meaningful conversations about mental health not only helps those we care about but also promotes our personal growth. It enhances our empathy, understanding, and communication skills. By listening to others, we gain insights into different perspectives and experiences, fostering a deeper connection with those around us.



# CHAPTER II

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## UNDERSTANDING ALEC

### The origins of ALEC

The ALEC method—Ask, Listen, Encourage action, and Check in—originated from R U OK?, an Australian mental health initiative founded in 2009. The primary goal of R U OK? is to inspire and empower everyone to meaningfully connect with the people around them and support anyone struggling with life. ALEC was developed as a straightforward, practical framework to facilitate these conversations.

The method gained further prominence through Movember, a global charity focused on men's health. Movember adopted ALEC to help address the rising mental health issues among men, encouraging them to open up and seek support. This collaboration amplified ALEC's reach, making it a widely recognized and effective tool for promoting mental well-being.

### EASE OF IMPLEMENTATION

The beauty of ALEC lies in its ease of implementation. It's designed to be used by anyone, anywhere, and at any time. Whether you're talking to a friend

over coffee, chatting with a colleague during a break, or having a heart-to-heart with a family member at home, ALEC provides a structured yet flexible approach to support mental health.

- Accessible to All: You don't need any special skills or training. The steps are intuitive and can be naturally integrated into conversations.
- Adaptable: ALEC can be tailored to suit various situations and individuals. Whether the person you're talking to is a close friend or a casual acquaintance, you can adjust your approach accordingly.
- Empowering: Using ALEC empowers you to take action and support those around you, fostering a culture of care and compassion within your community.

By adopting ALEC, you become part of a larger movement to promote mental well-being. As you practice and become more comfortable with these steps, you'll find that checking in on your mates becomes second nature, creating a ripple effect of support and understanding.



## ASK

The first step is to simply ask, "Are you okay?" This might seem like a small gesture, but it can open the door to a deeper conversation. Choosing the right time and place to ask is crucial. You want to ensure that the environment is private and free from distractions so that the person feels comfortable sharing their feelings.

### Tips for Asking:

- **Be relaxed and friendly:** Approach the conversation with a calm and open demeanor. A casual, non-confrontational tone can help put the person at ease.
- **Be specific about your concerns:** If you've noticed changes in their behavior, gently point them out. For example, "I've noticed you've been quieter than usual lately. Is everything okay?"
- **Use open-ended questions:** Questions that require more than a yes or no answer encourage the person to share more. For instance, "How have you been feeling lately?"



## LISTEN

Listening is more than just hearing words; it's about being present and giving your full attention. Let the person talk without interrupting, and show empathy through your body language and responses. Listening is a powerful way to show that you care and that their feelings are valid.

### Tips for Listening:

- **Maintain eye contact:** This shows that you are engaged and focused on what they are saying.
- **Nod and use verbal cues:** Simple acknowledgments like "I see" or "That sounds tough" can encourage them to continue sharing.
- **Avoid immediately jumping in with advice:** Your primary role is to listen and understand. Offer solutions only if they ask for your input.





## ENCOURAGE ACTION

Once they've shared their feelings, the next step is to encourage action. This doesn't mean solving their problems for them, but rather guiding them towards finding solutions or seeking professional help if needed. Encouraging action can empower them to take control of their situation and seek the support they need.

### Tips for encouraging action:

- **Suggest they talk to someone else they trust:** Sometimes, just talking to another friend or family member can be helpful.
- **Offer to accompany them to see a professional:** This could be a doctor, counselor, or psychologist. Your support in this step can make a big difference.
- **Encourage them to engage in activities they enjoy:** Simple activities like going for a walk, reading a book, or spending time with friends can boost their mood.



## CHECK IN

Follow up with them after your initial conversation. This shows that you genuinely care and are there for them in the long term. Checking in can help maintain the support and encouragement they've received, reinforcing that they are not alone.

### Tips for checking in:

- **Schedule a time to catch up again:** This could be a coffee date or a casual chat over the phone. Regular check-ins can provide ongoing support.
- **Send a message or give them a call:** A simple text or call to see how they're doing can make a significant impact.
- **Continue to offer your support:** Remind them that you are there for them and that it's okay to seek help whenever they need it.



# CHAPTER III

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## PUTTING ALEC INTO PRACTICE

Now that we've covered the ALEC method's fundamental principles, let's explore practical scenarios and examples to help you apply this approach effectively. Understanding how to use ALEC in various contexts can make a significant difference in your confidence and preparedness to support your mates.

### Scenario 1: A friend in need

Imagine your friend Sam has been more withdrawn lately and has stopped attending social gatherings. You decide to reach out and check in using the ALEC method.

#### Step-by-Step Example:

**1. Ask:** "Hey Sam, I've noticed you haven't been around much lately. Are you okay?"

- Why it works: This question is direct yet gentle, showing concern without being intrusive.

#### 2. Listen:

- Sam: "I've just been feeling really down and overwhelmed. It's been hard to find the energy to do anything."
- You: "That sounds really tough. I'm here to listen if you want to talk about it."
- Why it works: You acknowledge Sam's feelings and offer a listening ear, which can help him feel heard and supported.

#### 3. Encourage Action:

- You: "It might help to talk to someone about this. Have you considered seeing a counselor? I know it can be hard, but it might really help."
- Sam: "I've thought about it, but I'm not sure where to start."
- You: "How about I help you look for a counselor, or we can ask our GP for a recommendation together?"
- Why it works: You're offering practical support and breaking down the barriers to seeking help.

#### 4. Check In:

- You: "Let's catch up again next week to see how you're doing. And if you need to talk before then, just give me a call."
- Sam: "Thanks, I really appreciate it."
- Why it works: This follow-up shows ongoing support and reinforces that you're there for the long haul.

#### Scenario 2: A colleague under pressure

Your colleague Maria seems unusually stressed and has been missing deadlines. You decide to have a conversation with her after noticing these changes.

Step-by-Step Example:

1. Ask: "Hey Maria, I've seen you've been under a lot of pressure lately. How are you holding up?"

- Why it works: This approach shows empathy and concern without making assumptions.

2. Listen:

- Maria: "I've been feeling overwhelmed with all the deadlines. It's been hard to keep up."
- You: "It sounds like you're dealing with a lot. Do you want to talk more about what's been going on?"
- Why it works: You validate her feelings and invite her to share more, indicating you're genuinely interested.

3. Encourage Action:

- You: "Maybe we can speak to HR about adjusting your workload temporarily. What do you think?"
- Maria: "I'm worried about how that will be perceived, but I think I really need it."
- You: "I can come with you for support if you like, and we can explain the situation together."
- Why it works: You offer a practical solution and support in taking action, reducing her anxiety about the process.

4. Check In:

- You: "I'll check in with you tomorrow to see how you're feeling about everything. We can also have regular catch-ups to make sure you're okay."
- Maria: "That would be great, thank you."
- Why it works: Regular follow-ups provide continuous support and help build a supportive work environment.



### Scenario 3: Supporting a young person

Your younger sibling, Mia, seems anxious about school and has been withdrawing from family activities. You decide to use ALEC to check in with her.

Step-by-Step Example:

1. Ask: "Hey Mia, you seem a bit stressed about school lately. Is everything okay?"
  - Why it works: This approach is gentle and specific, opening the door for Mia to share her feelings.
2. Listen:
  - Mia: "School has been really tough, and I feel like I can't keep up."
  - You: "That sounds really hard. I'm here for you. Do you want to talk more about what's been happening?"
  - Why it works: You validate her experience and provide a supportive space to share.
3. Encourage Action:
  - You: "Have you thought about talking to a school counselor or a teacher you trust about how you're feeling?"
  - Mia: "I don't know how to start that conversation."
  - You: "We can look up some resources together, or I can help you talk to someone at school."
  - Why it works: You offer practical help and make the idea of seeking support more accessible.
4. Check In:
  - You: "Let's check in again after your next school day to see how you're doing. We can talk more then."
  - Mia: "Thanks, I'd like that."
  - Why it works: Regular follow-ups show sustained support and care, helping Mia feel less alone.

By using these practical examples, you can see how the ALEC method can be tailored to different situations and individuals. The key is to approach each conversation with empathy, patience, and a genuine desire to help. In the next chapter, we'll address common barriers to starting these conversations and provide strategies to overcome them.

# CHAPTER IV

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## OVERCOMING BARRIERS

It's natural to feel apprehensive about starting conversations about mental health. Fear of saying the wrong thing or being intrusive can hold us back. However, understanding common barriers and learning how to overcome them can help you feel more confident in checking in with your mates.

### Barrier 1: Fear of Rejection

**The Barrier:** One of the most common fears is that your concern might be rejected or unwelcome. You might worry that your mate will push you away or deny there's a problem.

#### How to Overcome It:

- **Approach with Empathy:** Frame your concern in a caring and non-judgmental way. For example, "I've noticed you've seemed down lately. Is everything okay?"
- **Be Patient:** Understand that not everyone may be ready to open up immediately. If your mate isn't ready to talk, let them know you're there whenever they are ready.
- **Normalise the Conversation:** Emphasize that it's okay to talk about mental health. Sharing your own experiences, if appropriate, can help reduce stigma and make the conversation feel more normal.

### Barrier 2: Feeling Inadequate

**The Barrier:** You might feel that you lack the expertise to help someone with their mental health issues. The fear of saying the wrong thing or not knowing how to respond can be paralyzing.

#### How to Overcome It:

- **Focus on Listening:** Remember, you don't need to be an expert to provide support. Your primary role is to listen and show you care.
- **Educate Yourself:** Learn about mental health and the resources available. Knowing where to guide your mate for professional help can be incredibly valuable.
- **Use ALEC:** Follow the ALEC method as a structured approach to guide your conversation.



### Barrier 3: Personal Discomfort

**The Barrier:** Talking about mental health can be uncomfortable for you, especially if you're not used to having these types of conversations.

#### How to Overcome It:

- **Prepare Yourself:** Think about what you want to say in advance. Practicing with a trusted friend or family member can help you feel more confident.
- **Start Small:** Begin with less intense topics and gradually build up to more serious discussions as your comfort level increases.
- **Focus on the Other Person:** Remember that your discomfort is secondary to the well-being of the person you're checking in on. Keeping this in mind can help you push past your initial hesitation.

### Barrier 5: Time Constraints

**The Barrier:** Busy schedules and lack of time can make it difficult to have meaningful conversations.

#### How to Overcome It:

- **Make Time:** Prioritize these conversations as part of your regular interactions. Even a quick check-in can make a difference.
- **Use Technology:** If you can't meet in person, use phone calls, texts, or video chats to stay connected.
- **Integrate into Daily Activities:** Combine check-ins with other activities, like going for a walk or having a meal together, to make it feel less burdensome.





# CONCLUSION

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## THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF SOMETHING GOOD.

Checking in with your mates using the ALEC method is a powerful way to support mental health and well-being. By asking, listening, encouraging action, and checking in, you can make a meaningful difference in the lives of those around you. Remember, the most important thing you can do is show that you care and are there to support them.

In New Zealand, where community and connection are deeply valued, fostering a culture of care and compassion can have a profound impact. By normalizing conversations about mental health and reducing stigma, we can create a society where everyone feels supported and valued.

So, take the time to check in with your mates. Your conversation could be the one that makes all the difference.



# RESOURCES

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## WEBSITES



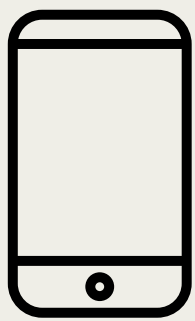
[MATES matter NZ](#)

[Mental Health Foundation](#)

[Movember](#)

[RU OK?](#)

## ONLINE TOOLS AND E-THERAPY



[Just a thought](#)

[Aunty Dee](#)

[Small steps](#)

## HELPLINES



**NEED TO TALK?** Free call or text [1737](#) – a trained counsellor is available 24/7.

**Lifeline** 0800 543 354 or text ‘help’ to [4357](#) – provides 24/7 confidential support from qualified counsellors and trained volunteers.

**Youthline** 0800 376 633 or free text [234](#) or webchat [www.youthline.co.nz](http://www.youthline.co.nz)