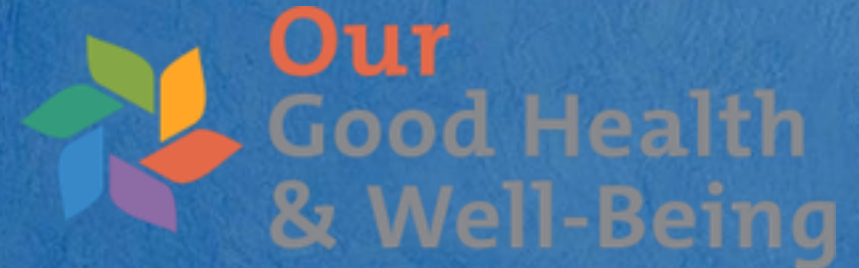




# Compassion Fatigue: Work, productivity, life and health

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Our Good Health and Well-Being



# Objectives

- Explain compassion fatigue and burnout
- Explore how caring for others can cause ill health and lower well-being
- Recognize warning signs of compassion overload, and propose remedies
- Describe what employers can do to assist both employees who are caregivers on the job, and employees who are caregiving for loved ones, and how it relates to *Total Worker Health*®





Who are  
caregivers?



Paid  
caregivers



“As we transition towards recovery, we have a moral obligation to address the long-standing crisis of burnout, exhaustion, and moral distress across the health community...

**We owe health workers far more than our gratitude. We owe them an urgent debt of action.**”

*Surgeon General, Vivek H. Murthy, MD, MBA*

Nearly 1 in 5 adults in the U.S. are unpaid caregivers for ill, elderly or special-needs adults.

61% of these caregivers were employed at some point during the year surveyed.

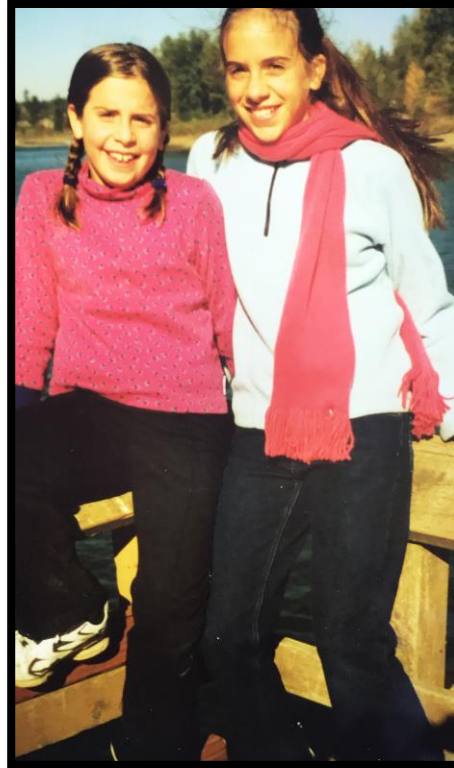
*Caregiving in the U.S.*, National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP, 2020 (Unpaid family caregiving)



# My story with loved ones: who are yours?



Providing care  
during serious  
illness or injury



Providing elder and  
end-of-life care

# What is Compassion Fatigue?

- Emotional and physical exhaustion leading to a diminished ability to empathize or feel compassion for others
- “Negative cost of caring”
- Develops as a result of "the provider's exposure to their patients' experiences combined with their empathy for their patients."





Warning  
signs

# Common signs and symptoms

- Chronic exhaustion (emotional, physical, or both)
- Reduced feelings of sympathy or empathy
- Dreading working for or taking care of another and feeling guilty as a result
- Feelings of irritability, anger, or anxiety
- Depersonalization (sadness & apathy)
- Hypersensitivity or complete insensitivity to emotional material
- Feelings of inequity toward the therapeutic relationship
- Headaches
- Trouble sleeping
- Weight loss
- Impaired decision-making
- Problems in personal relationships
- Poor work-life balance
- Diminished sense of career fulfillment



# “Costs of caring”

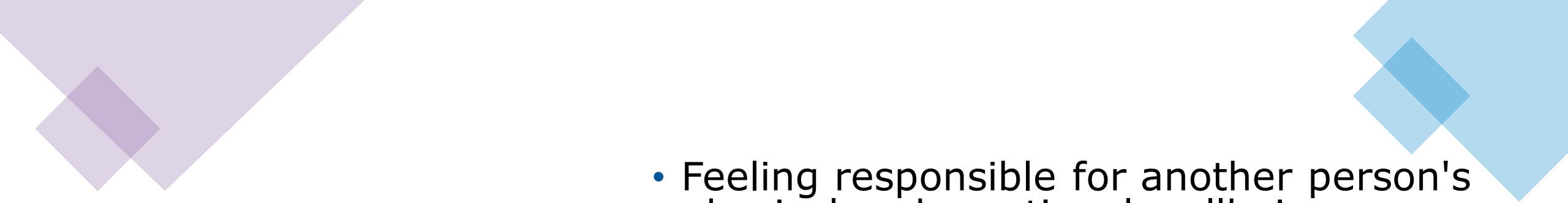
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- Changes in mood - depression, anxiety, sleep difficulties  
- relational conflicts both at home and within the work environment: decrease in life quality.
- Employees may exhibit decreased productivity through increased sick time, difficulties with performing their role when they are at work, and low morale. This may have an impact on the performance of the organization and may affect the quality of care offered to clients who use these services.




Compassion  
fatigue v. Burnout

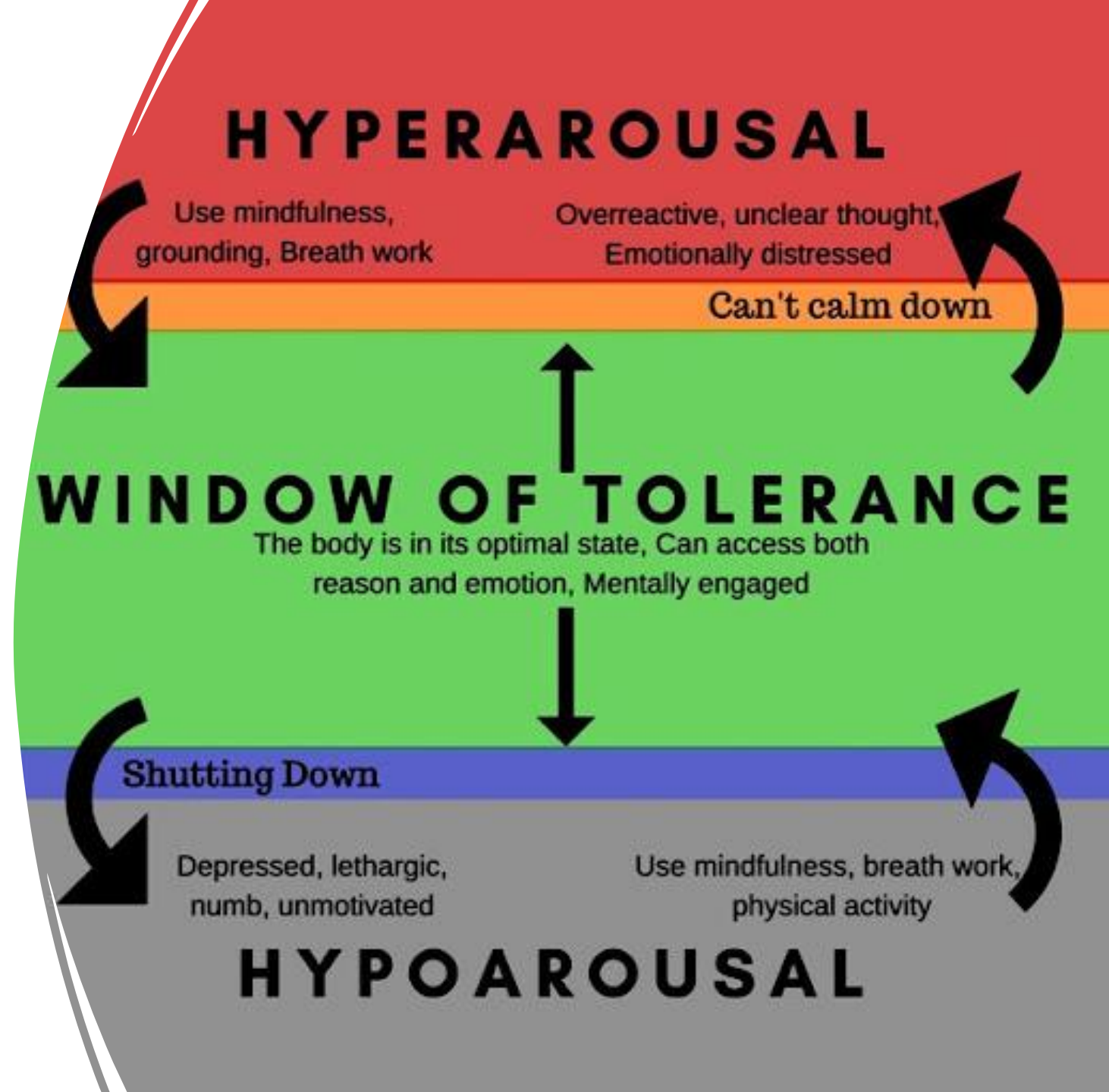




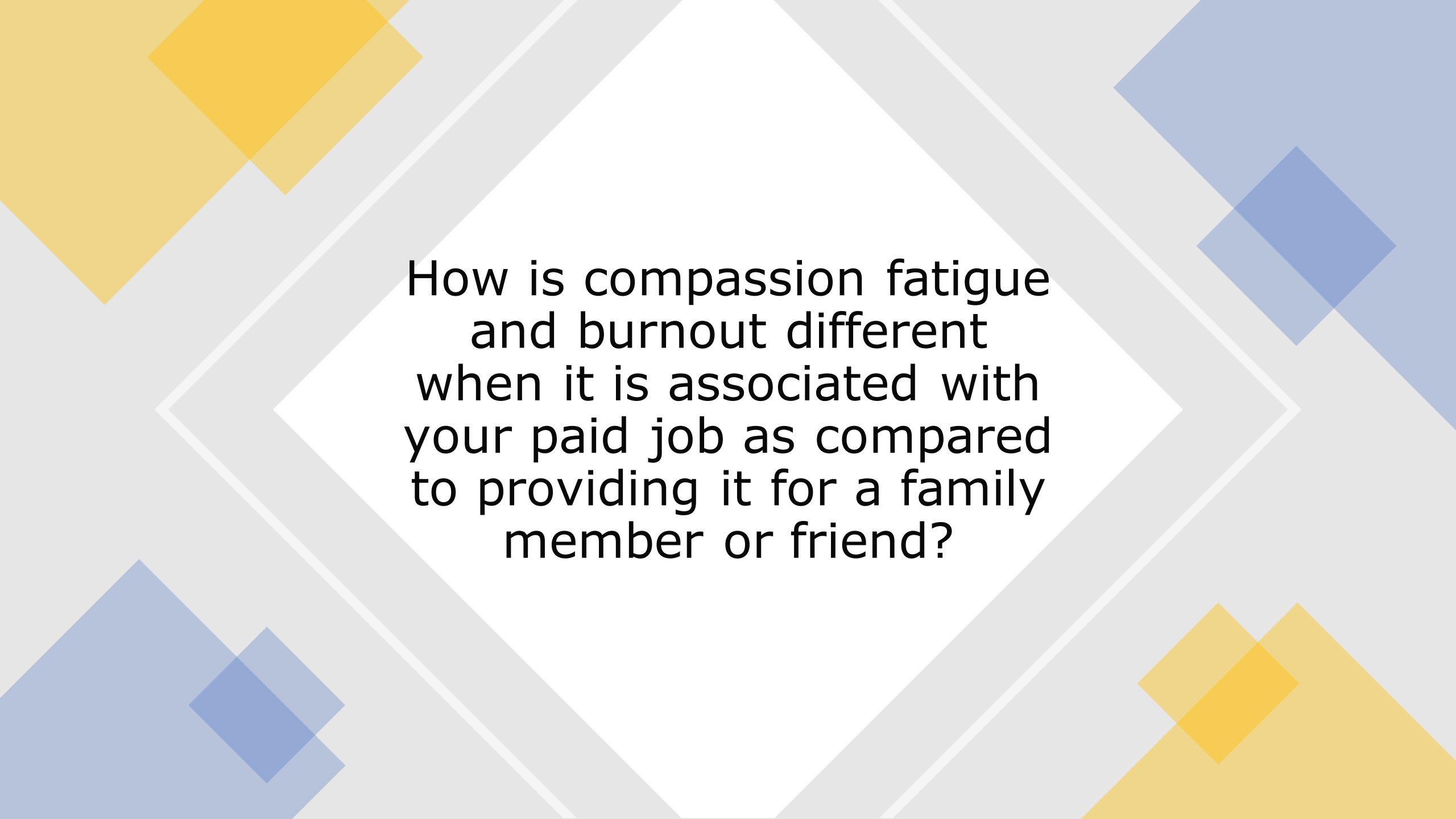
# What leads to caregiver burnout?

- Feeling responsible for another person's physical and emotional wellbeing.
  - Trying to meet everyone's needs.
  - Not knowing exactly what your responsibilities are.
  - Having too many things to do.
  - Lack of privacy or independence.
  - Not being able to say no to your loved one.
  - Feeling that you don't have the necessary skills to care for another person.
  - Feeling that you've failed.
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- Credit:  
<http://www.hallidayquinn.co.uk>







How is compassion fatigue  
and burnout different  
when it is associated with  
your paid job as compared  
to providing it for a family  
member or friend?

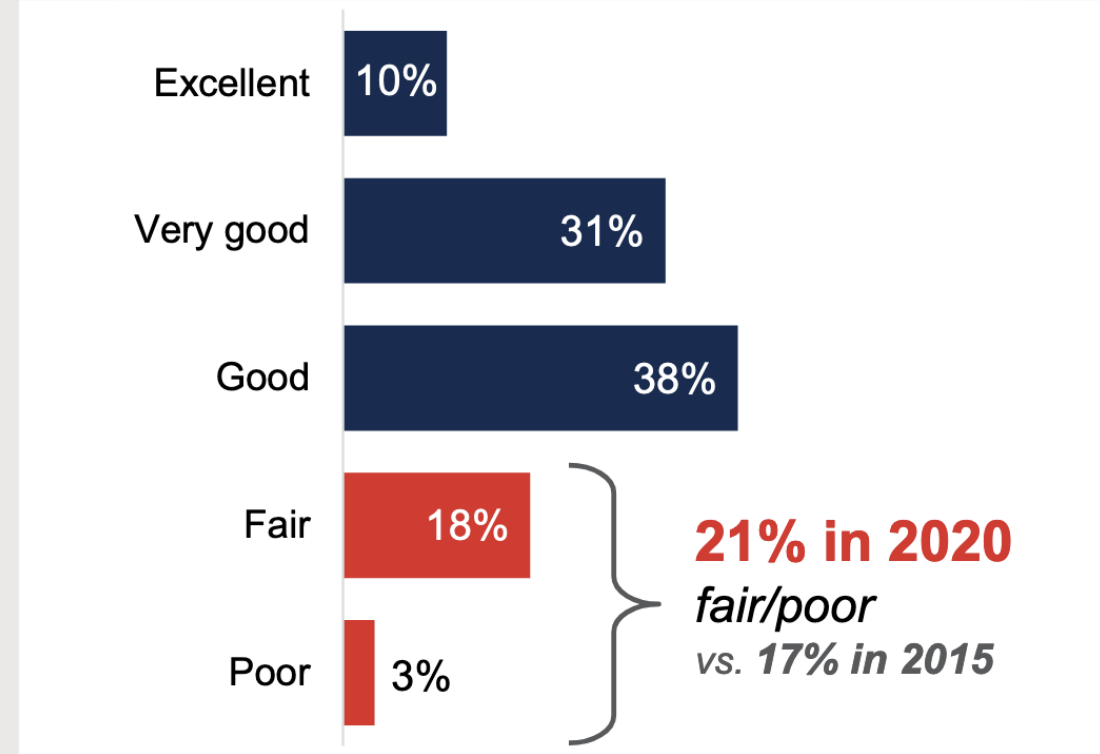
Where does unfairness fit in?

**Life isn't fair**

**Workplace favorites**

**Judgement by family members**

**Figure 47. Caregiver Self-Rated Health**



D1. How would you describe your own health? / When you were last caregiving, was your health ...?

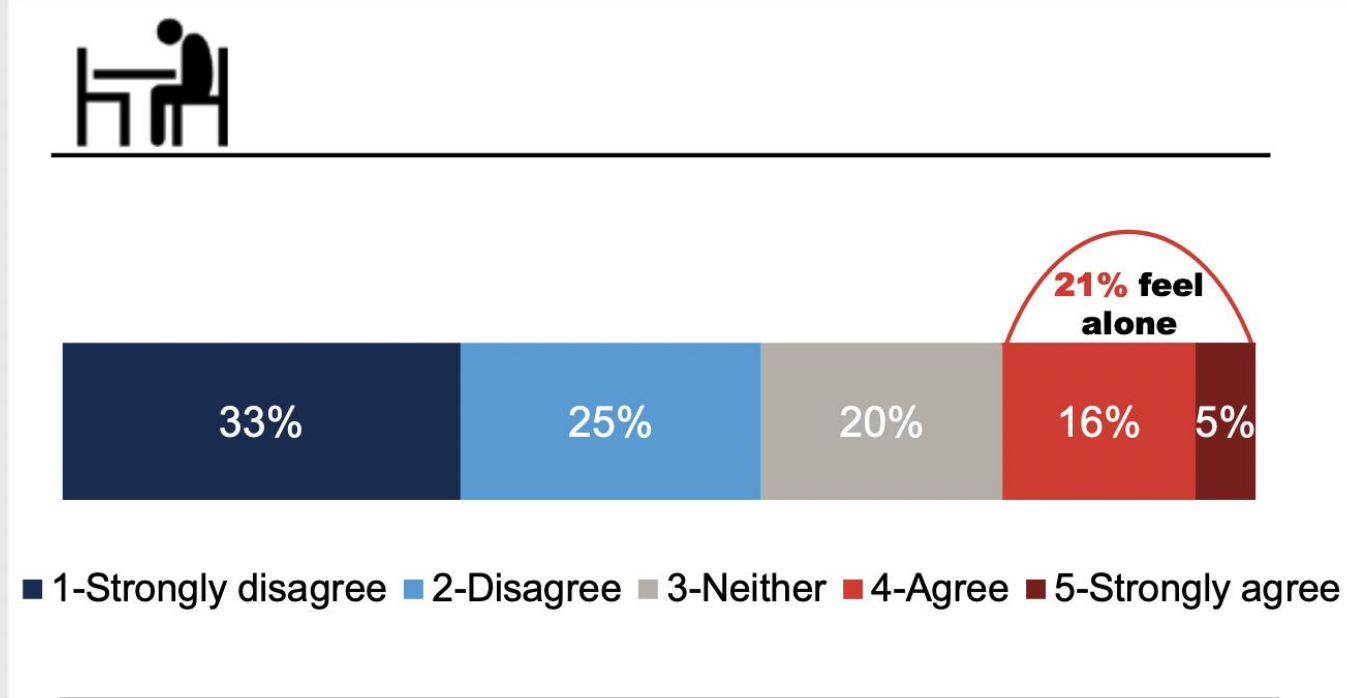
**2020 Base: Caregivers of Recipient Age 18+ (n=1,392)**

Caregiving in the United States, 2020

<https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2020/05/full-report-caregiving-in-the-united-states.doi.10.26419-2Fppi.00103.001.pdf>



**Figure 54. Feeling Alone**

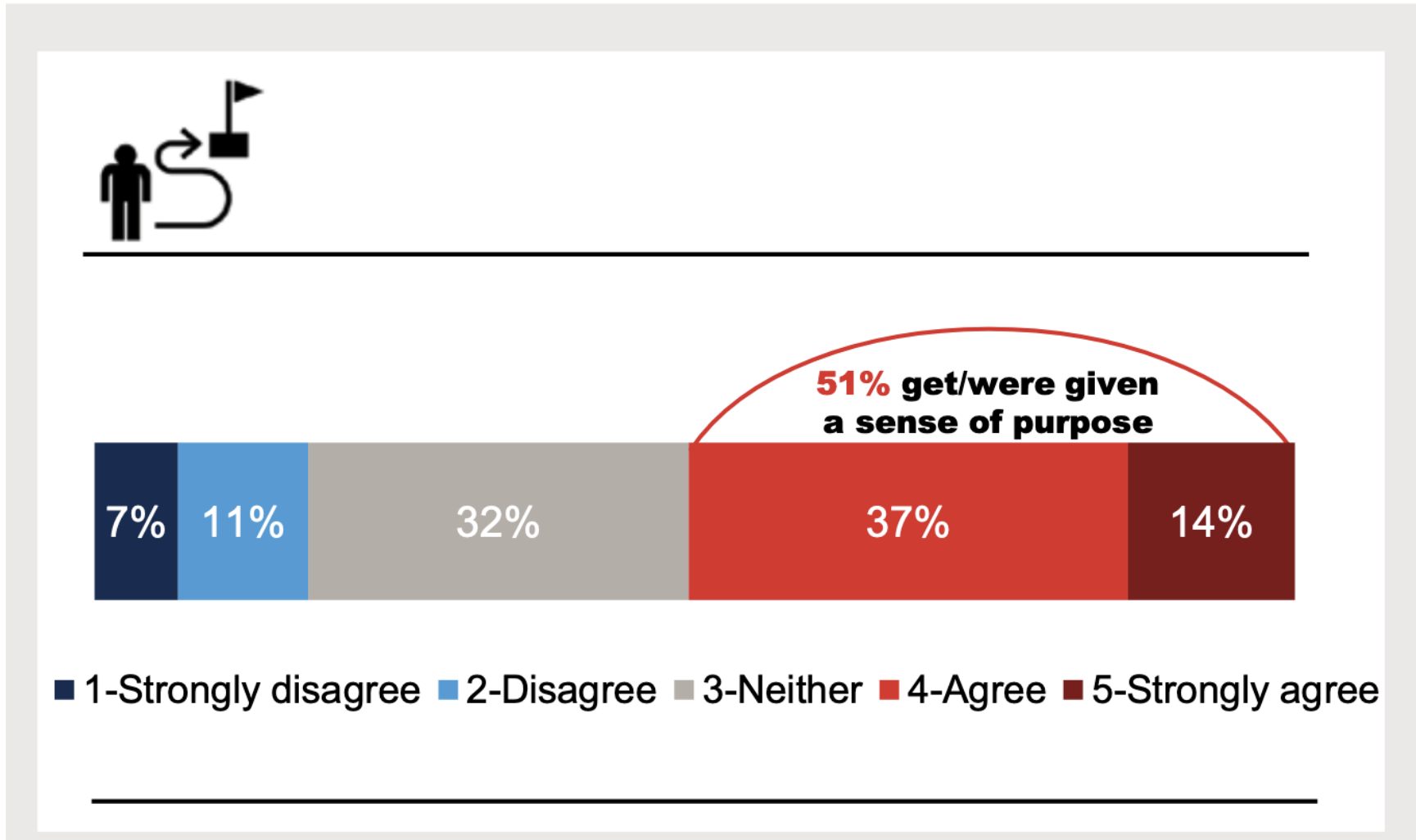


M5c. How much do you agree or disagree with each statement below about being a caregiver for your [relation]? "I feel/felt alone"

**2020 Base: Caregivers of Recipient Age 18+ (n=1,392)**

*Note: Results are rounded and don't know/refused responses are not shown; results may not add to 100 percent.*

Figure 55. Sense of Purpose



Workplace strategies –  
some basics

*Employees in certain demographics are more likely to have caregiving responsibilities. The median age of caregivers of adults is 51, according to the AARP report, and 61 percent of caregivers are females.*

- Paid leave for caring for family members
  - OR requirements
- Flexible work hours
- Paid sick leave
- Programs to help caregivers (e.g., paid backup care)
- EAP support and programs

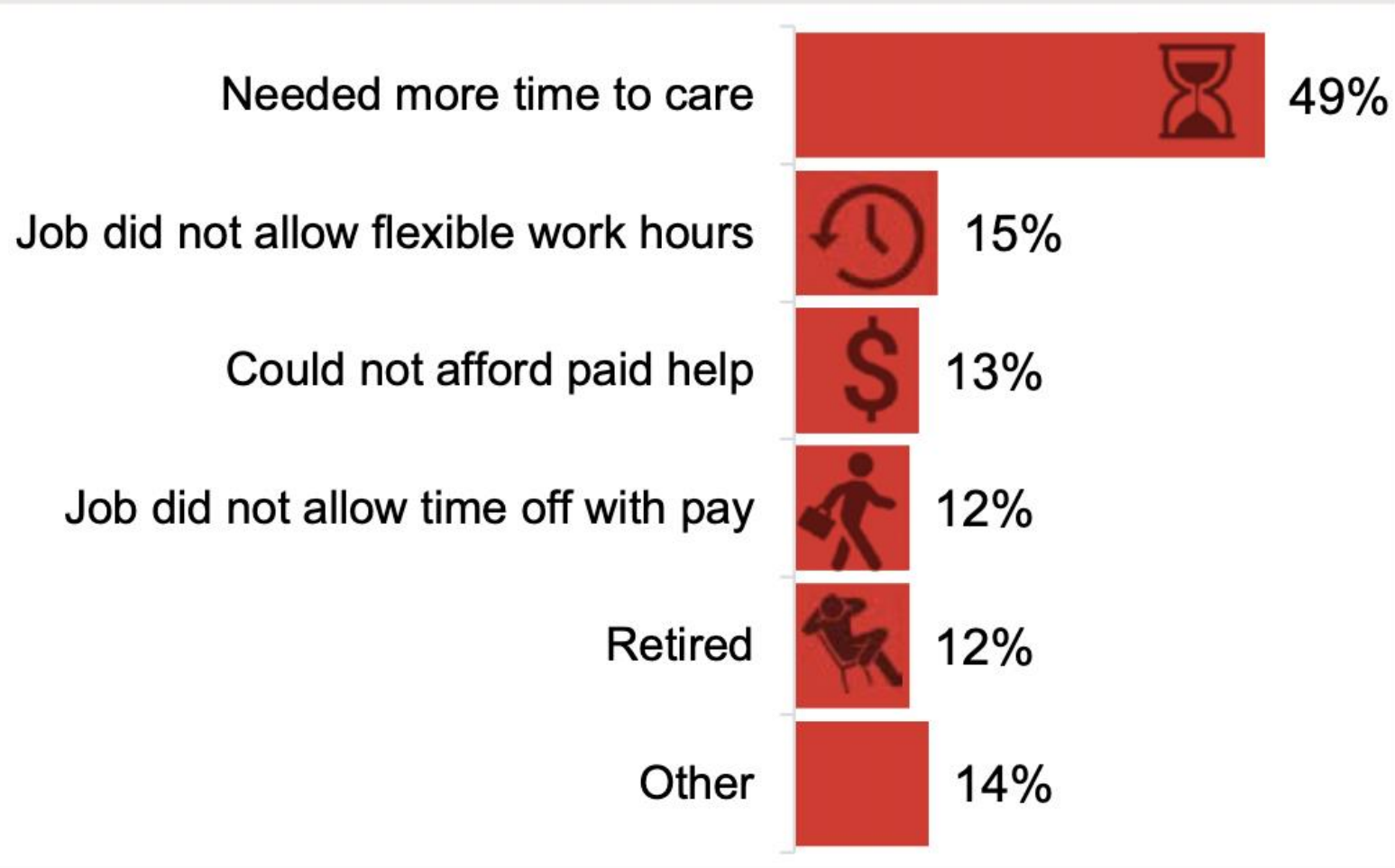


# Other workplace strategies

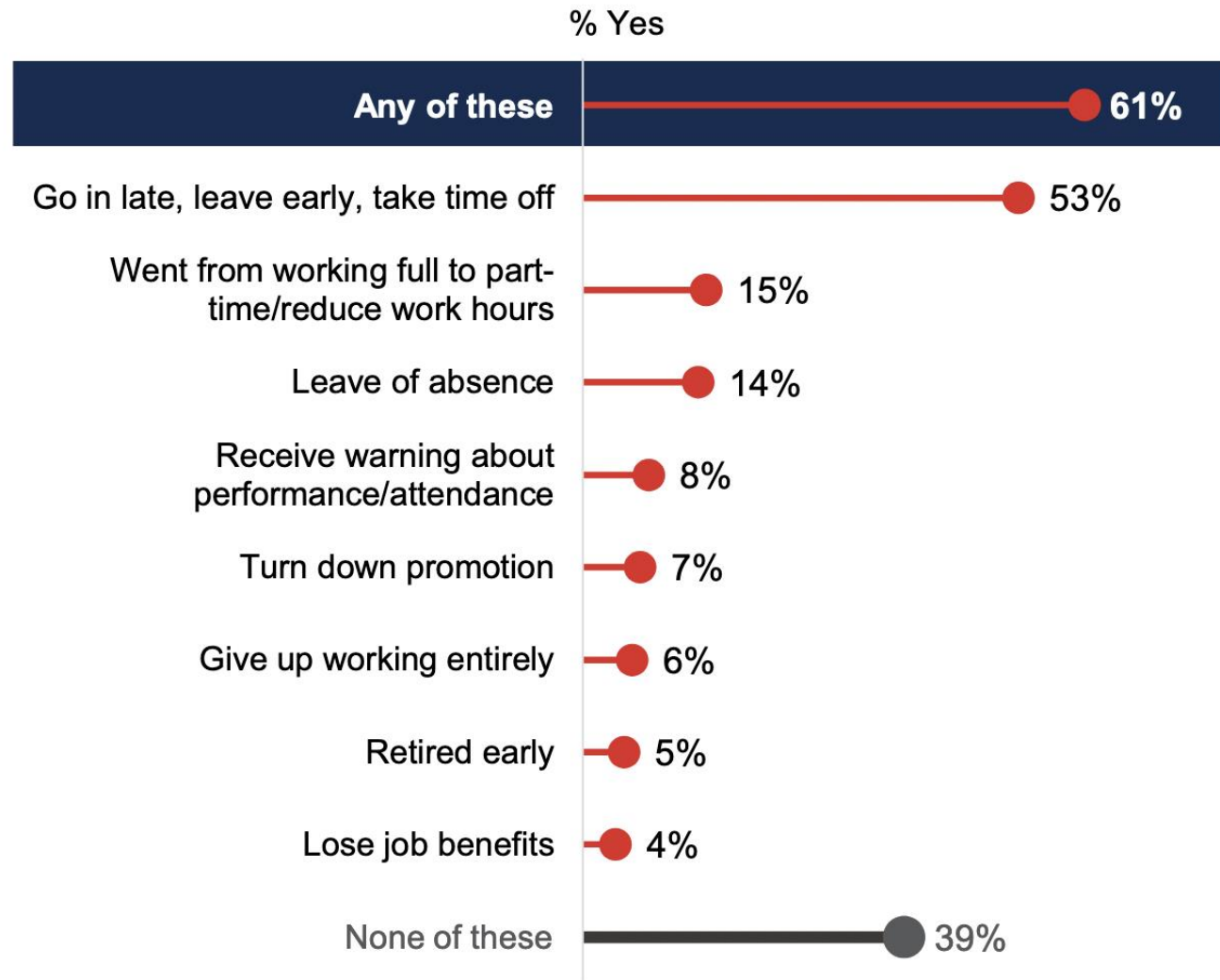
- Support groups and open discussions about stress and compassion fatigue in the workplace
- Regular breaks
- Routine check-ins
- Mental health days
- Onsite counseling
- Relaxation rooms, massage, meditation classes, etc.

**More ideas?**

**Figure 71. Reasons Caregivers Stopped Working**



**Figure 69. Work Impacts as a Result of Caregiving**



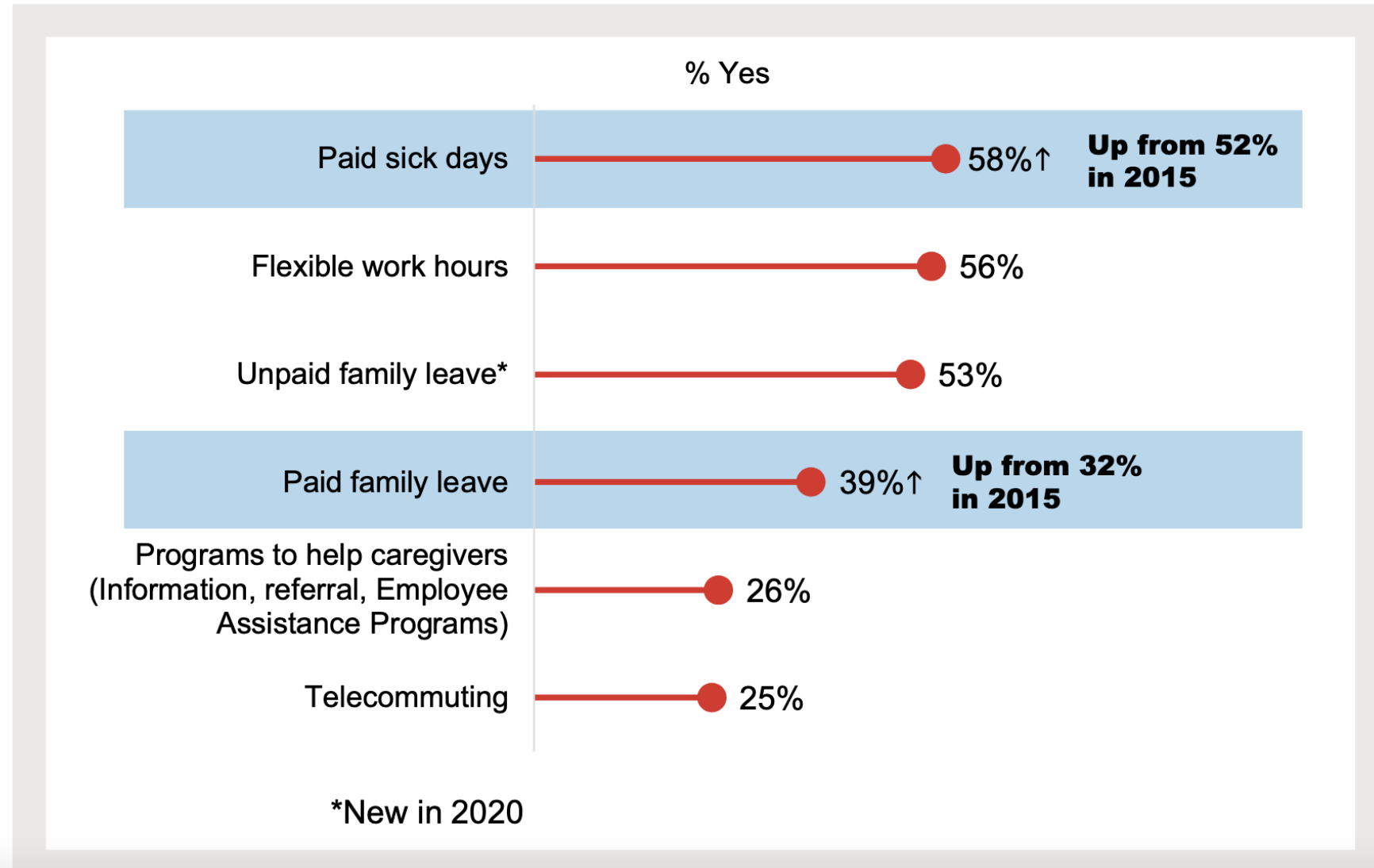


# Recap: How to accommodate employees caring for (sick) family members

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- Offer flexibility
- Understand FMLA
- Offer support (e.g., benefits that address caregiver burden, support groups, etc.)
- Provide reasonable leave
- Other ideas?

**Figure 67. Workplace Benefits for Caregivers**



# Recap: Tips for all caregivers

## **Individual**

- Be aware of changes in your level of compassion fatigue
- Make self-care a priority
- Spend time with friends
- Join caregiver support groups
- Write in a journal
- Use positive ways to cope with stress
- Spend time on hobbies
- Set realistic goals

## **Employer**

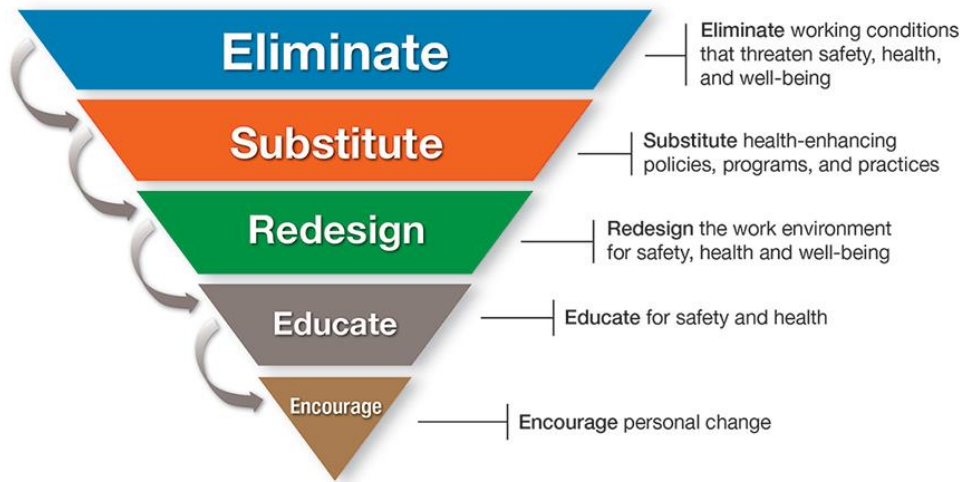
- Acknowledge the topic with employees
- Open lines of communication
- Communicate benefits available
- Communicate Employee Assistance Program (EAP) program
- Promote well-being resources
- Reduce stigma



# Bigger Ideals: What can organizations do?

- Leadership interventions: accept that staff are experiencing compassion fatigue (in working with those who have been traumatized)
- Supportive supervision
- Measure
- Provide education and skill building
- Create a culture of caring
- Policy considerations (examples)

# Caregiver Burnout Strategies



The Hierarchy of Controls Applied  
to NIOSH  
*Total Worker Health*® Framework

**Evaluate shift scheduling, overtime and workloads**

**Engage with workers for ideas, solutions and concerns**

**Promote and offer EAP services, programs**

**Consider forming employee affinity and support group**

**Review leave policies including family leave and educate employees**

**Promote supportive supervisor training, work to reduce stigma, open communication lines**

**Other ideas?**



Next step?  
New idea?

Reach Dede at  
[ddmontgo@lhs.org](mailto:ddmontgo@lhs.org)

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