



talkspace for Business

Employee Stress Check

2021 REPORT

The tipping point between
retention and resignation

SEPTEMBER 2021

Introduction

The space between employee *stress* and the *great resignation*

While stressful events and uncertainty continue to redefine the workplace, many employees are still waiting for employers to fulfill promises made over the last 18 months to address well-being, inclusivity, and support.

Employers across the U.S. are working hard to modernize the employee experience, yet the cultural shift is immense. As the workplace becomes more complex in regards to employee locations and needs, it will take time for companies to become proficient in recognizing new warning signs of stress and disengagement. However, doing so is critical. Better knowledge and solutions enable the success of employees, and as a result, the employer.

With this in mind, Talkspace commissioned a survey with The Harris Poll to explore current employee attitudes toward mental well-being and work.

While many have spoken about a great resignation, our pulse survey has identified a period of “great reflection” that comes first. This represents the tipping point where chronic stress finally triggers an employee to seek immediate resolution. A majority of employees now face burnout, which is also causing physical health and professional issues. Employees are more aware than ever of what they need to see, hear, and have access to in order to stay engaged and perform at their best. The opportunity for employers to define preventative policies and resources for at-risk employees has never been more important.

Employers who adequately support employee well-being in all forms are more likely to see positive impacts on productivity, time management, and other key factors that lead to better workplace outcomes and employee retention. To keep up, employers will need to listen to employees, be receptive to change, and offer new ways to support employee success and well-being.

Methodology

Talkspace commissioned a survey with The Harris Poll in August 2021 (field dates July 29th-August 2nd) among 1,015 full-time employees in the United States. Results were weighted by gender, region, race, age, income, and education to known estimates to align them with their actual proportions in the population and survey across an array of sectors and work levels.

The big picture



Chronic stress is leading workers to reconsider their commitment to employers

Two of every three employees who consider leaving their job agree that their employer has not followed through on early pandemic promises to focus on employee mental health. With 52% of all employees feeling burned out as of late, the quality of mental health that employers enable—from access to participation—is emerging as a key differentiator between companies that retain employees and those that lose them.

LIKELY TO RESIGN

Employees who are likely to resign in the next 6 months report the *highest rates of work burnout* and stress symptoms.

80% describe themselves as burned out

43% have a hard time sleeping due to stress

39% feel short tempered

39% feel their physical health has suffered

NOT LIKELY TO RESIGN

Employees who are not likely to resign in the next 6 months report *nearly half the rate of burnout*, temper, and physical issues as the resignation group.

39% describe themselves as burned out

30% have a hard time sleeping due to stress

21% feel short tempered

17% feel their physical health has suffered

While stress impacts all employees, many demographic groups are demonstrating heightened feelings of stress—potentially in connection to the unique backgrounds they bring to the workplace and the experiences they face. As a result, many of these groups are also having greater reactions to stress—including struggles related to individual productivity, work relationships, and job re-evaluation.

- **Employees under 35** are 44% more likely than others to make avoidable mistakes at work due to stress
- **Remote employees** are 44% more likely than others to experience relationship difficulties with managers due to stress
- **Working moms** are 35% more likely than others to lose focus at work due to stress
- **Essential employees** are 16% more likely to consider changing careers because of mental health issues

Fortunately, employees have many recommendations to improve workplace well-being. A diverse programming approach, beyond paid time off, is highly valued and demonstrates an employer's commitment to its workforce. Supportive managers and a culture of well-being are top of mind for employees.

- **Paid time off** for mental health (74% would find helpful)
- **Transparency** about the company (72%)
- **Open-door policies** with managers (69%)
- **Trainings** on managing mental health (64%)
- **Subsidized** counseling and therapy (64%)

5 key takeaways

1 50% of employees believe work has become too stressful these days

Policies related to COVID, staff turnover, and other fluctuations are requiring employees to operate in a constant state of change.

4 Employees are underutilizing the company resources they believe are most helpful

Although 52% of employees report burnout, less than 20% of them are using the company benefits they believe are “most helpful” for mental health.

2 Nearly 25% of employees believe that work stress has impacted their physical health

Employees report sleep troubles, short tempers, and increased substance use as common issues related to stress levels.

5 Nearly 60% of employees believe that supportive management can improve retention

When it comes to retention and engagement, ‘a manager that prioritizes mental health’ is more highly ranked by employees than both a strong culture and mentorship.

3 41% of employees are likely to consider a job change to resolve stress

Employees are bypassing helpful company policies, such as changing teams or short-term leaves, in favor of resignation.

What employees have to say



Employee stress drivers

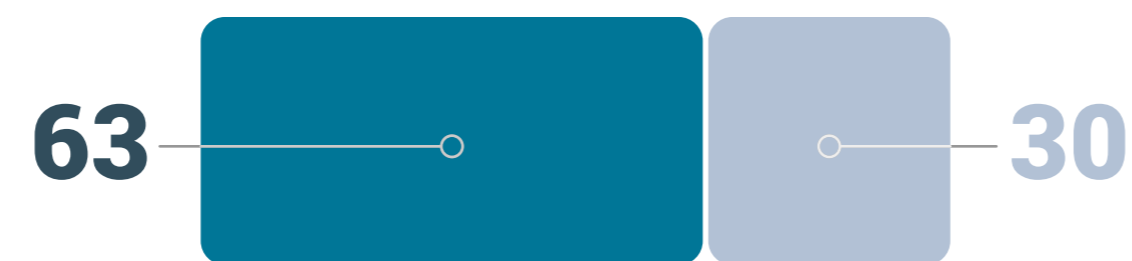
1. The unpredictable nature of the COVID pandemic is leading to a “great reflection” among two thirds of employees

The day-to-day uncertainty generated by the COVID pandemic has pushed individuals to question their priorities. 50% of employees believe that work has become too stressful these days. This is leading to high levels of employee re-evaluation. Nearly two out of every three employees are thinking more about what they want and need.



One in two workers are burned out and/or find work too stressful these days

Covid has pushed me to reflect more on what I want out of my job and my career.



- Strongly/somewhat agree
- Strongly/somewhat disagree

What Talkspace therapists have observed

“

I think the pandemic allowed people to say, wait a minute, what am I doing with my life? Do I really want to be at this job? Is this bringing joy?

– Bisma Anwar, LMHC

“

After being pushed into a different day-to-day experience, people have realized there can be another way of living. Options and choices felt present for the first time. They are coming into therapy to figure those choices out.

– Cynthia Catchings, LCSW-S

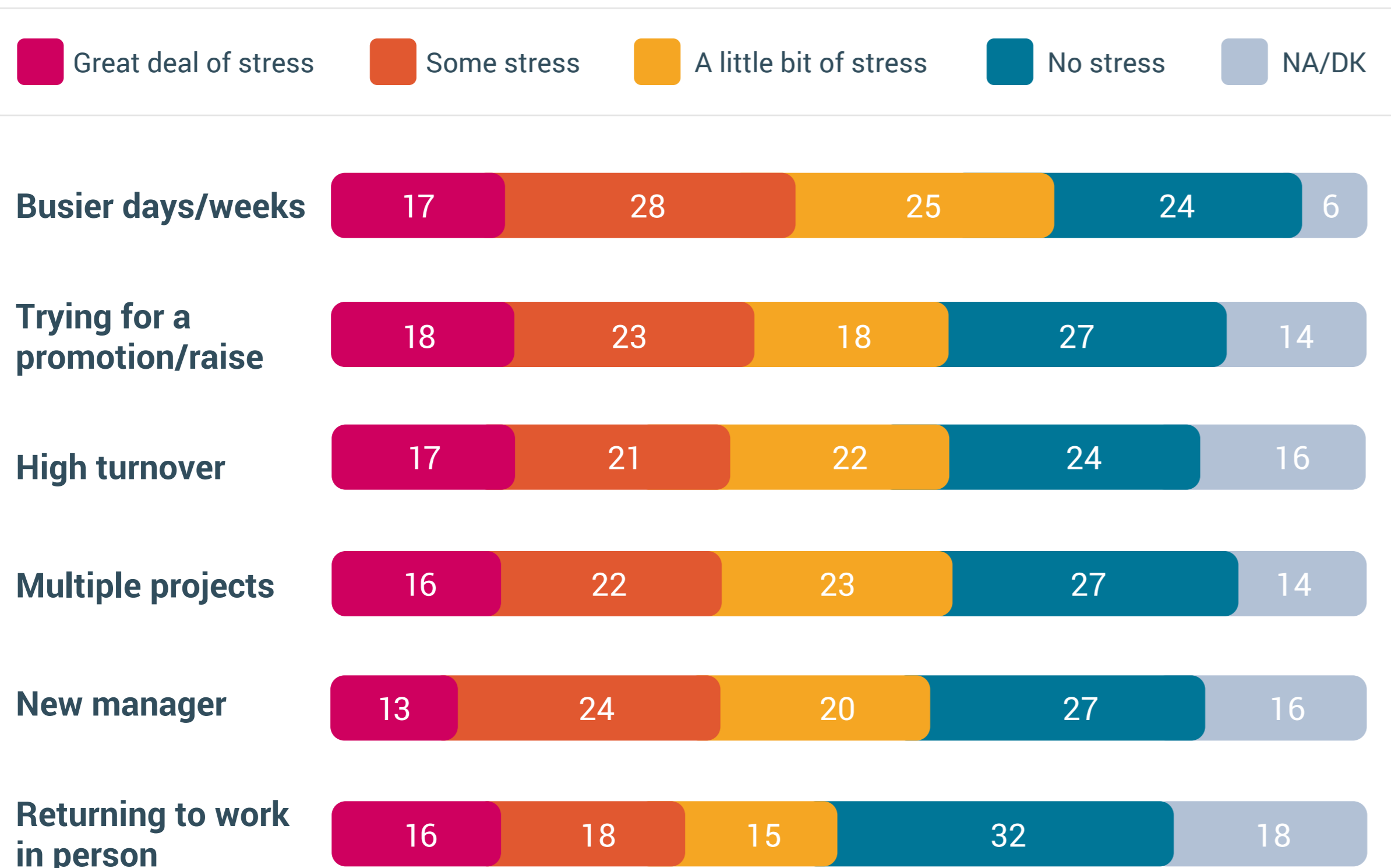
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The pandemic brought mental health and personal well-being into focus as a priority. People want to hang onto that. If it's not supported by their employers, people are having a tough time reconciling a commitment to work.

– Jill Daino, LCSW-R

2. The need to adapt to continual change is leaving more than one third of employees highly vulnerable

When it comes to experiencing change in the workplace, “no stress” is the reality of very few employees. The majority are caught in a vicious cycle. Heightened stress levels can lead employees to be more easily triggered by common work experiences.



Q: How much stress does each of the following events at work cause you?

What Talkspace therapists have observed

“

My clients are struggling right now, there's only so much change people can take. Whether it's changing teams at work, or changing CDC guidelines and return to work plans, these non-stop changes and stressors really add up and can lead to burnout.

– Kate Rosenblatt, MA, LPC, LMHC

Certain groups feel higher levels of stress in key work situations

Three demographic groups—younger workers, BIPOC employees, and working moms—stand out for feeling more stress during busy times, while trying for advancement, or when balancing multiple projects. These work situations also stand out as stressors for essential and remote workers.

How much stress does each event cause you? (% great deal of stress/stress)

Demographic group differences

	Total	Under 35	BIPOC	Moms
<i>Busy work days</i>	45%	50%	47%	54%
<i>Trying for a promotion/raise</i>	41%	50%	43%	47%
<i>Multiple projects/clients</i>	37%	44%	40%	41%

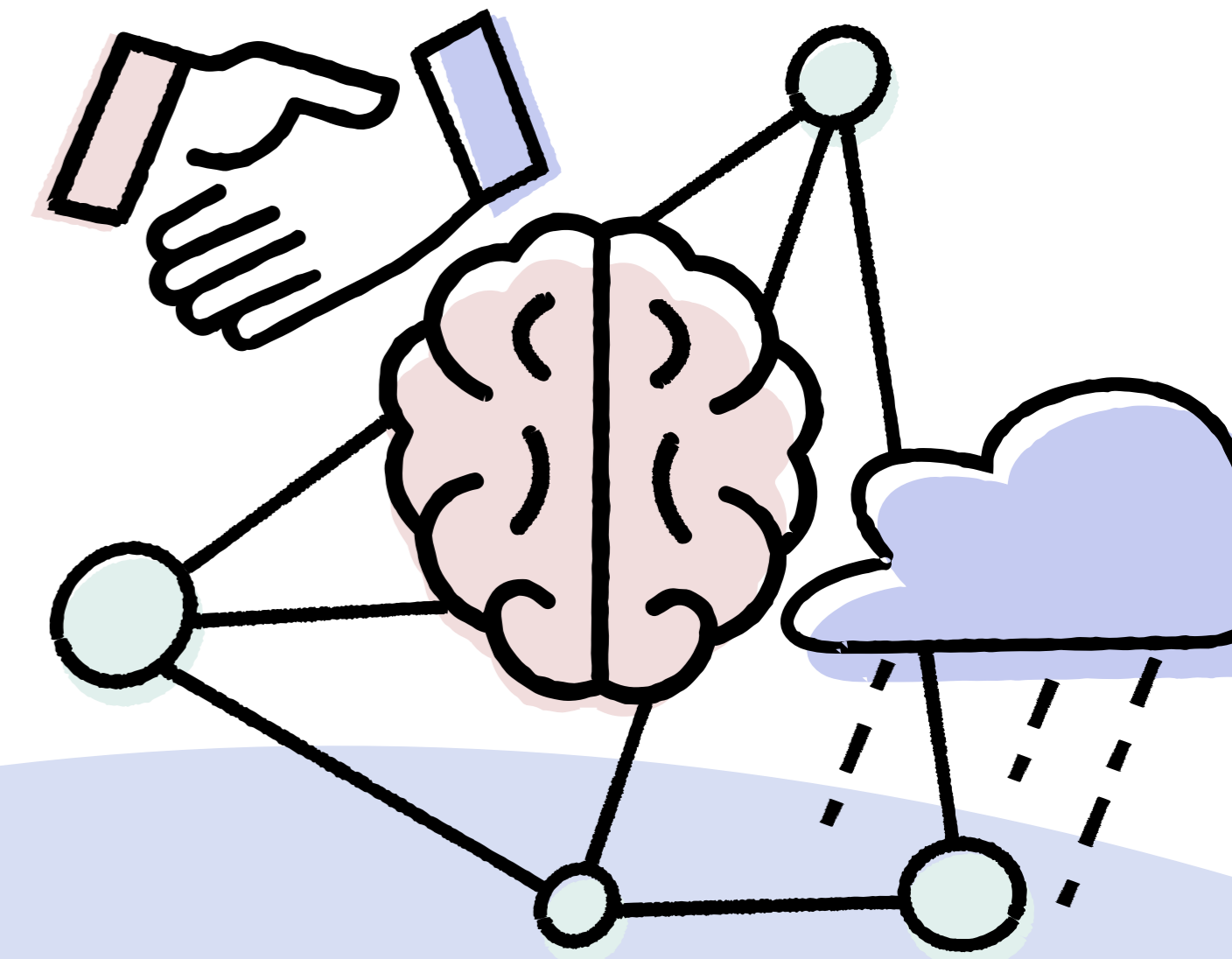
Employee group differences

	Total	Essential	Remote
<i>Busy work days</i>	41%	50%	49%
<i>Trying for a promotion/raise</i>	38%	45%	46%
<i>Multiple projects/clients</i>	28%	38%	47%

Research participants self-identified as belonging to one of the above groups during survey completion

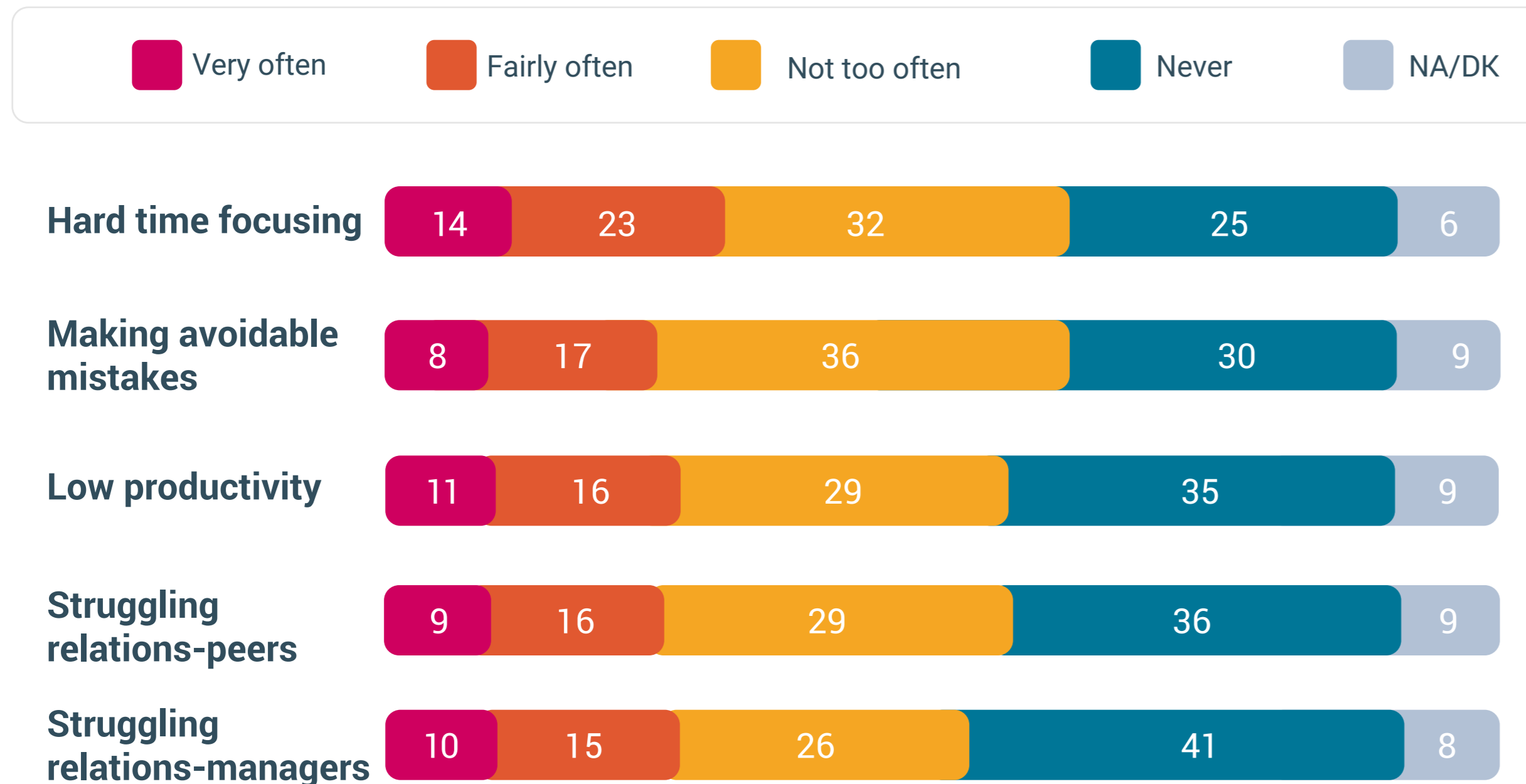
Q. How much stress does each of the following events at work cause you? Answers reflect “stress” or “a great deal of stress”

Why employers should take stress seriously



At least 25% of employees are underperforming regularly due to stress

Feelings of stress and burnout are leading to a decline in focus and productivity in the workplace, more mistakes, and interpersonal relationship struggles with peers and managers.



Q: How often, if at all, have issues around mental health led to the following situations around your job?

What Talkspace therapists have observed

“

A lot of my clients measure their self-worth by their productivity and by their external and professional achievements. So often a conversation we have is about acknowledging the fact that your self-worth is not rooted or tied to external achievements.

– Dr. Amy Cirbus, LMHC

“

Once the weight of self-worth has lifted, employees can feel more engaged, and ultimately, be more productive.

– Liz Kelly, LICSW

Certain groups feel higher levels of stress in key work situations

Half of **working moms** and **employees under the age of 35** reported lack of focus as the most common reaction to stress—and over a third also report struggling with mistakes and managing relationships with bosses. **Essential and remote workers** are also more likely to report these issues.

Impacts of stress at work (% very, fairly often)

Demographic group differences

	Total	Under 35	Moms
<i>Lost focus</i>	37%	50%	50%
<i>Avoidable mistakes</i>	25%	36%	36%
<i>Struggling relationships with managers</i>	25%	33%	36%

Employee group differences

	Total	Essential	Remote
<i>Busy work days</i>	37%	40%	49%
<i>Trying for a promotion/raise</i>	25%	29%	37%
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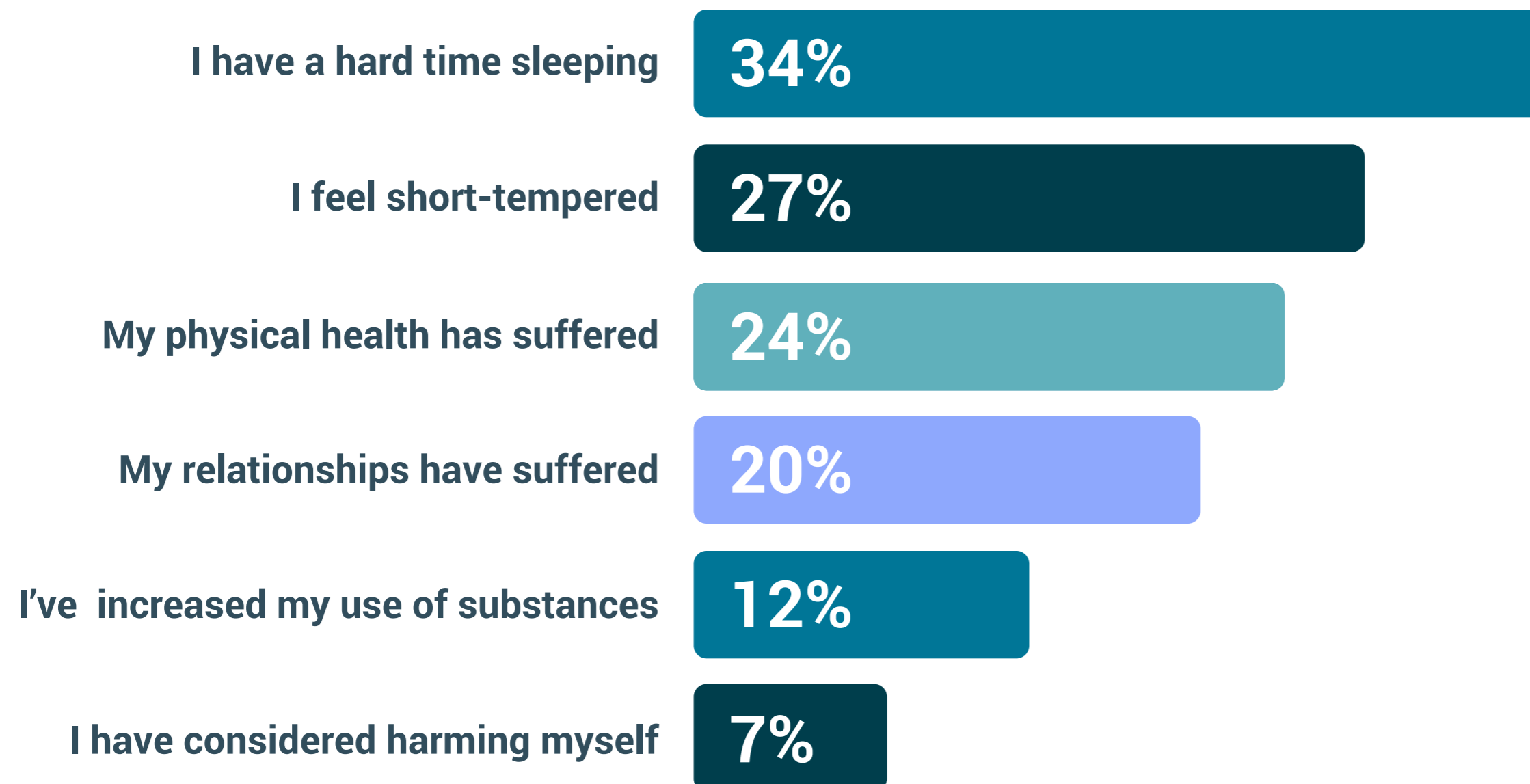
Research participants self-identified as belonging to one of the above groups during survey completion

Q. How often, if at all, have issues around mental health, like stress, led to the following situations around your job? Answers reflect “very often” or “fairly often”

Nearly 1 in 4 employees believe their physical health has suffered because of their job

More than one third of all respondents specifically identify sleep challenges as a common issue in addition to overall health struggles. Though not highly reported in this survey, substance use and self-harm are alarming risk factors for employers to consider.

Impacts of Work Stress



Q. In which ways, if any, has work stress impacted other areas of your life? Please select all that apply.

What Talkspace therapists have observed

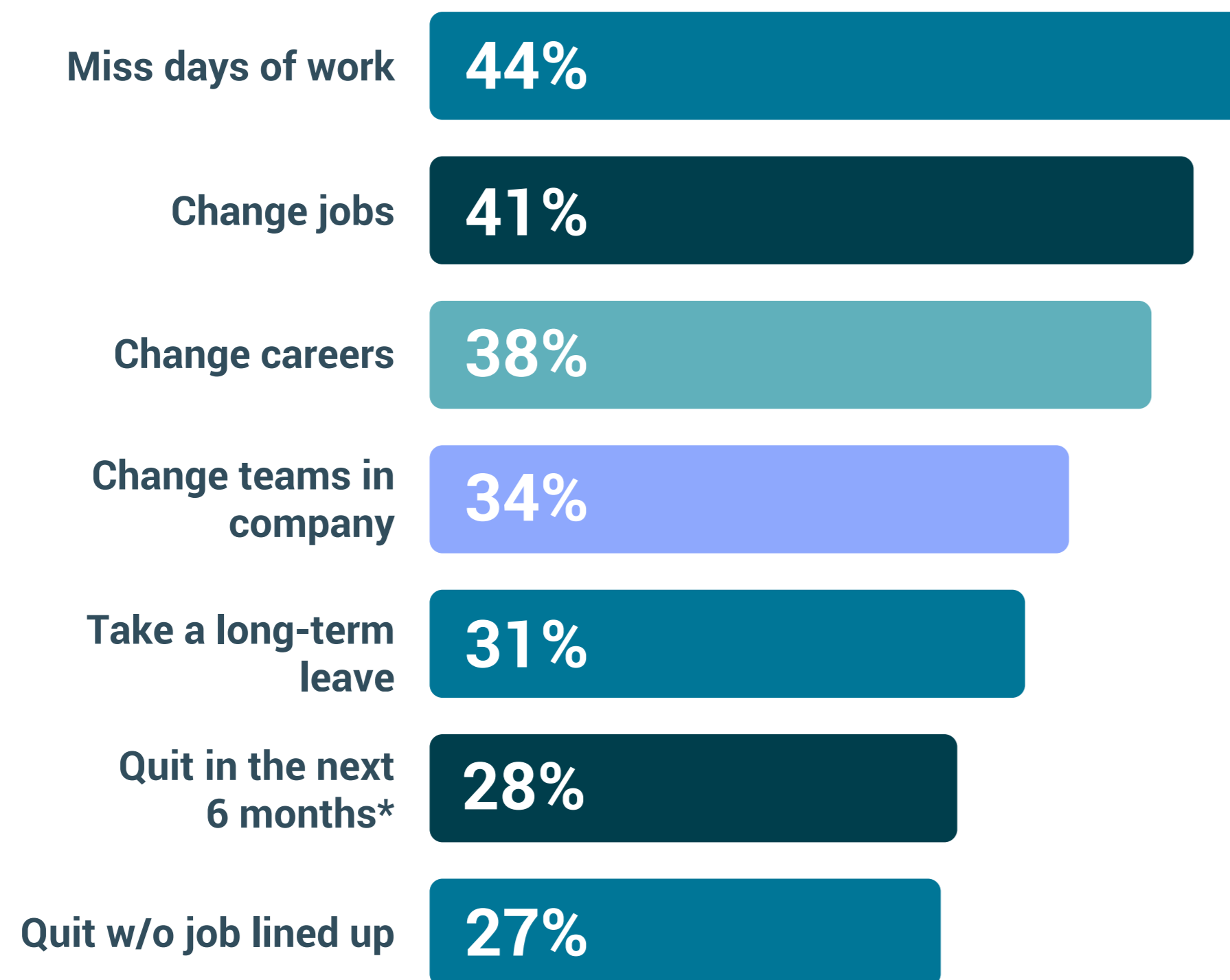
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The mind-body connection is very real. Changes in physical health can be a sign that we're not managing stress effectively. Over the last year, many of my clients have struggled to set boundaries around work. They're responding to emails late at night and on the weekends or working one back-to-back shift after another. When this becomes the norm, it will eventually take a toll.

– Kate Rosenblatt, MA, LPC, LMHC

More than 40% of employees are likely to seek a job change because of stress

Employees are reacting to stress in a range of ways that could hinder company success—including missing work days, seeking extended leaves, and resigning from their position altogether.



Q. How likely are you to consider each of the following due to stress at work?
 Q. How likely are you to quit your job in the next 6 months?*

Potential job changers are very likely to report a lack of support from their employer

While employees expected their companies to stand up for mental health during the pandemic, the current reaction is split. Those considering resignation are noticing a lack of follow-through on company promises around mental health and well-being.

“My employer says employees should focus on ‘self-care’ but doesn't provide the resources to do so.”



“My employer claimed to focus on mental health at the beginning of the pandemic but has not followed through.”



*Employees who are likely to quit in the next 6 months.

Compared with total respondents, certain groups report much higher consideration of job resignation

The increased response rates highlight how differently stress can impact employees. For example, employees under the age of 35 are more than 10 points more likely to change jobs, switch careers, or resign in the next six months. These populations may experience a number of factors that heighten the feelings of and reaction to stress, including, but not limited to, culture, isolation, recognition, opportunity, and respect in the workplace.

Consider each because of work (% likely)

Demographic group differences

	Total	Under 35	BIPOC	Moms
Change jobs	41%	55%	47%	46%
Change careers	38%	52%	48%	47%
Quit in the next 6 months*	28%	38%	32%	32%

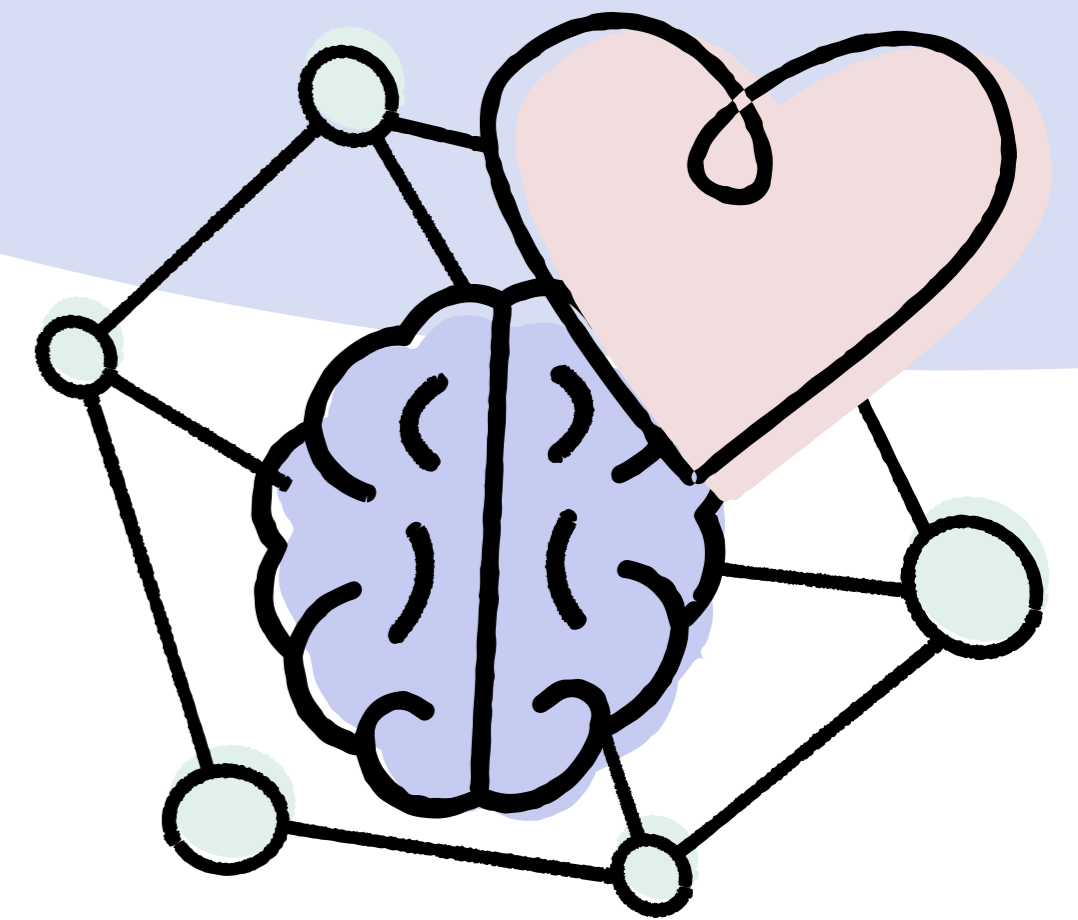
Employee group differences

	Total	Essential	Remote
Change jobs	41%	45%	48%
Change careers	38%	44%	44%
Quit in the next 6 months*	28%	30%	42%

Research participants self-identified as belonging to one of the above groups during survey completion

Q. How often, if at all, have issues around mental health, like stress, led to the following situations around your job? Answers reflect "very often" or "fairly often"

How to address the stress

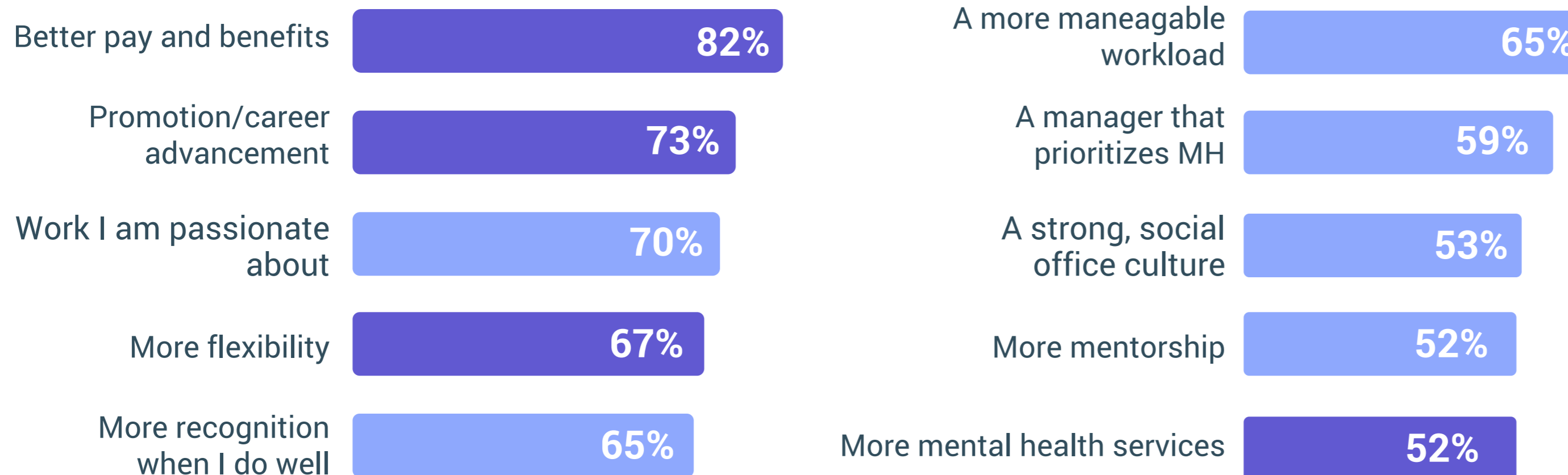


Acknowledge that employees want more than better pay

Management quality and culture matters

When it comes to employee engagement and retention, the desire for passion, recognition, and support doesn't fall too far behind pay and promotion. In fact, six of the top ten reasons employees would stay at an employer represent attributes connected to management, leadership, and culture. This is true across all key demographic groups.

What might convince you to stay?



Q. If you were considering quitting your job, how likely are each of the following to convince you to stay in your current position?

Contractual reasons Management/culture

What Talkspace therapists have observed



Don't take employees for granted. People do need to be told they're appreciated and respected.

– Jill Daino, LCSW-R

Make managers a critical part of your plan to increase mental health program utilization

As one of the most popular groups employees turn to for support, managers can build resource awareness and encourage usage

Employees are asking for more mental health resources. However, there is a large gap between what employees say will be helpful and what they have actually used—signaling that employees may not be fully aware of what’s available, or they may need to feel more comfortable to pursue sign up. When managers use and/or recommend resources, everyone benefits.

Resources and Benefits for Mental Health



Q. How helpful to your mental health would each of the following be in a work setting?
 Q. Which of the following services or employee resources related to mental health, if any, have you used?
 * Since this item is not a resource or benefit, follow up questions about usage were not asked

Encourage mental health conversation

With therapy, reality exceeds employee expectations

The benefit of therapy on individual work performance exceeds expectations by as much as 41%

Many employees don't accurately anticipate the positive impact that counseling and therapy support can have on productivity. Compared to those who have not tried therapy, employees receiving provider support are:

41% more likely to believe that therapy has increased work attendance

29% more likely to believe that therapy has improved time management skills

30% more likely to believe that therapy has helped them reach their goals

Positive Impacts (I See/Would Expect) from Therapy (%positive)

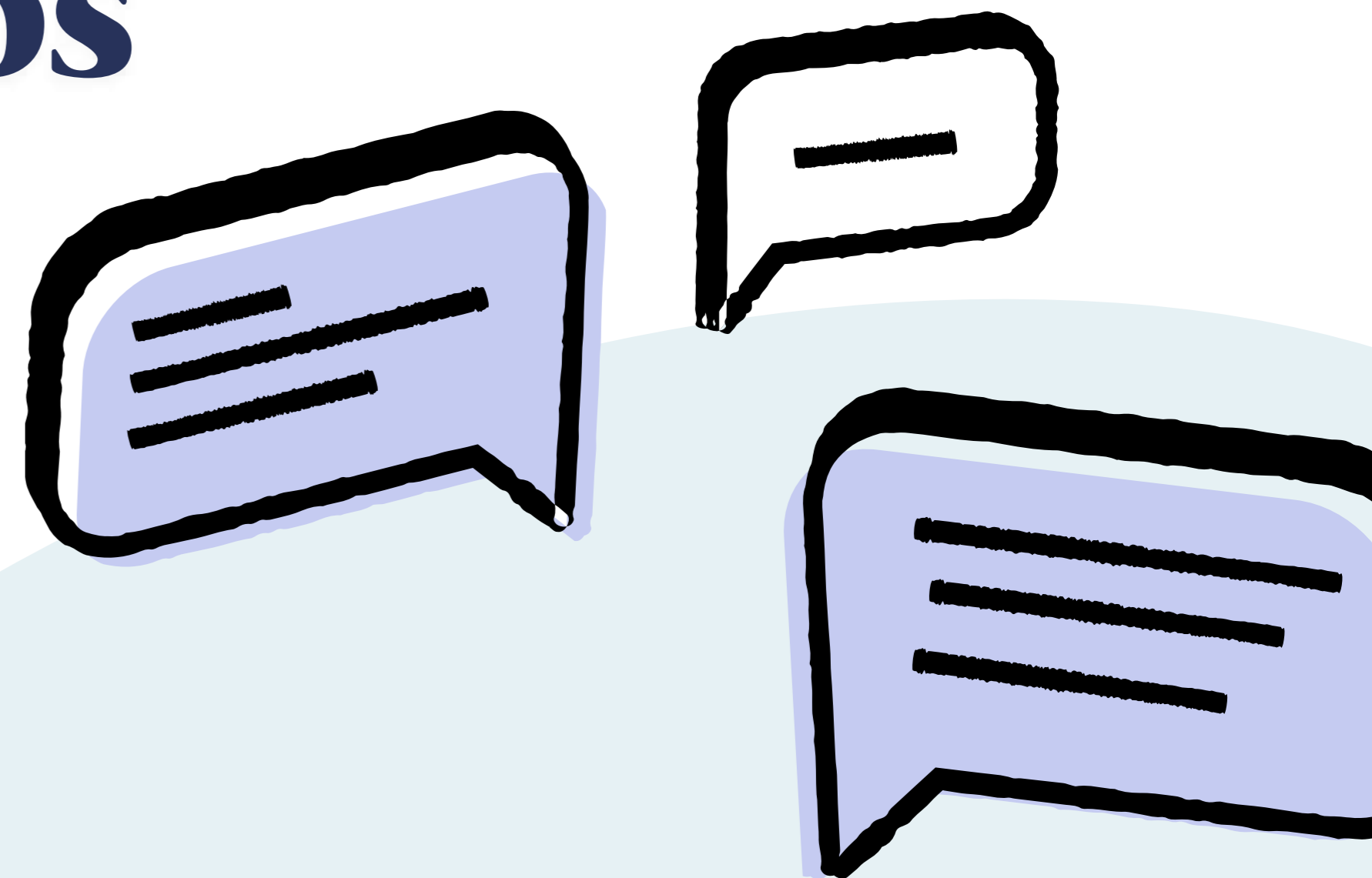


Q. Would you say therapy has had a positive or negative impact in the following areas at work?

Q. If you were to use therapy, do you think it would have a positive or negative impact in the following areas at work?

Stress management tips

from Talkspace therapists



Talkspace therapists' tips for *employees*

1. Diversify your input and pay attention to what you need

For better outputs, focus on better inputs, such as healthier snacks and meals, walking breaks, or 5-minute meditations.

“ Ask yourself, how are you feeling? What's your sociability like? Where are you diversifying your exercise and nutrition? These are important factors in feeling okay and safe. We bring our whole selves to work. Acknowledging our human needs at work is directly related to producing work that feels meaningful and productive

– Liz Kelly, LICSW

2. Wrap up the day recognizing your accomplishments list versus your incomplete list

It can be easy to stress about what you haven't done in a day rather than focusing on how productive you actually were. Make a list of all the things you did during your day and appreciate what you have completed.

“ Take the time to reflect on what you did accomplish. It provides the momentum and confidence to take on tomorrow.

– Bisma Anwar, LPC

3. Do your research when it comes to quitting

Seeing managers model mental health and set personal boundaries makes employees feel empowered to follow suit.

“ Burnout and stress often lead to decisions that are reactive rather than intentional, which doesn't provide long-term resolutions. Reach out and get the support you need to make the most informed decision. A therapist will provide emotional and mental help, and serve as a skilled guide to successfully navigate life and career transitions.

– Dr. Amy Cirbus LMHC, LPC

Talkspace therapists' tips for employers

1. Elevate mental health to a company value

Normalizing conversations about mental health is an ongoing process. Employers should regularly discuss the resources they provide and encourage employees to use them. Each employee is unique, and will benefit from different resources and approaches. There is no one-size-fits-all solution.

“ You don't have to guess. Send out surveys on a regular basis. Ask for feedback. Adjust as needed. Wellness benefits can be standard, but they don't have to be stagnant. They should be fluid enough to adapt to your workers' needs as culture and demands shift. Communicate benefits often and in dynamic ways. By celebrating what the company offers, it helps get the word out and works to reduce the stigma of mental healthcare.

— Dr. Amy Cirbus, LMHC

2. Offer mental health training

Employees greatly benefit from trainings on mental health at work. This both familiarizes them with tools to manage their mental health, and helps to normalize mental health conversations within company culture.

“ If I know that my employer is offering training, webinars, or providing communications about mental health and how we can take care of ourselves, it feels like they are opening the door. It provides space for dialogue and an opportunity to build skills that are of equal value to any job description.

— Bisma Anwar, LPC

3. Model boundaries and mental health

Seeing managers model mental health and set personal boundaries makes employees feel empowered to follow suit.

“ It's a powerful example to see your boss take a mental health day. It gives permission to follow suit, and it sends the message that mental health is respected.

— Elizabeth Keohan, LCSW



About Talkspace for Business

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Talkspace is a leading virtual behavioral healthcare company that delivers direct care services for a spectrum of mental health needs. From virtual counseling and therapy to psychiatry, Talkspace's managed network of fully credentialed and licensed providers represents 100+ areas of expertise.

All care is delivered through our private and secure digital platform, which also includes education and self-serve tools. With Talkspace, members can send their therapist private text messages anytime, or attend a live session with their psychiatric prescriber from anywhere.

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