

BECHMARKS OF CARE

When Caring Hurts: Managing the Emotional Rollercoaster of Caregiving

**CAREGIVER-READY
WORKPLACES**

BY CAREGIVER ACTION NETWORK

Meet Your Presenters



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Caregiving Doesn't Stay at Home

Why is it important to discuss the toll of caregiving on our mental health in the context of work? The emotional stress of caregiving can follow us into the workplace:

- Difficulties focusing in meetings or on tasks.
- Guilt about being away from your loved one (*“being in two places at once”*).
- Burnout and the impact on attendance and performance at work.

Caregiving Shows Up at Work

For HR leaders, caregiving is not a side issue. It is a workforce reality affecting attendance, focus, and retention.

70%

of working-age caregivers are employed while providing care.

1 in 2

working caregivers report going in late, leaving early, or taking time off.

Workday

impact may appear as distraction, guilt, irritability, or decision fatigue.

The Mental Health Toll Is Measurable

Caregiving stress is not only emotional. It shows up in health, work capacity, and day-to-day functioning.

7.0

average poor mental-health days reported by caregivers in the past 30 days.

38%

of caregivers report high emotional stress from caregiving.

23%

say caregiving makes it difficult to take care of their own health.

Implication: mental-health support is part of sustaining both care at home and performance at work.

Source: AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving, Caregiving in the U.S. 2025. Figure 33, CDC Healthy Days Measure; Figure 36, Emotional Stress of Caregiving; Figure 34, Difficulty Caring for Own Health.

Complex Emotions Are Normal — and Work -Relevant

Caregivers can feel **more than one thing at once** — even when they are doing their best.

Common examples:
guilt, anger, anxiety, resentment, grief, and relief.

Discussion prompt: What emotion is hardest for working caregivers to name out loud?

Burnout lowers emotional bandwidth

Sleep disruption, financial strain, and care crises make normal feelings harder to regulate.

Emotions may appear indirectly

At work, distress may look like withdrawal, distraction, irritability, or decision fatigue.

Support starts with recognition

Naming the experience helps caregivers ask for help and helps HR respond with practical options.

Professional Example: The 10 A.M. Call

A REALISTIC WORKDAY MOMENT

A caregiver receives a clinic call about a parent's medication change while preparing for a client meeting.

WHAT MAY SURFACE

Anxiety about the appointment, guilt about not being present, and frustration that work is being interrupted.

WHAT SUPPORT SOUNDS LIKE

"Take five minutes, confirm what is urgent, and let's decide what can move today."

The goal is not to leave caregiving at home. The goal is a practical reset and a clear next step.

MENTAL HEALTH AMERICA PERSPECTIVE

A Conversation with:

**Niya McCray -
Bown**

A dedicated conversation space for mental-health expertise, caregiver examples, and audience reflection.

Areas We'll Cover:

- 01** Recognize stress signals
What changes in sleep, focus, mood, or behavior should caregivers notice?
- 02** Reduce stigma at work
How can leaders make it safer to ask for support without over-disclosing?
- 03** Know when support is needed
When do complex emotions become a sign to seek professional help?
- 04** Connect to screening and resources
Where can caregivers start if they are unsure what they need?

In the Moment: Name, Pause, Reset

When complex emotions surface during the workday, the goal is not to suppress them. The goal is to create enough space to choose the next helpful action.

STEP 01

Name

Put words to the feeling:
“This is guilt,” “This is fear,”
or “This is anger.”

STEP 02

Pause

Step away when possible.
Take five minutes, breathe,
drink water, or delay a
response until the emotion
settles.

STEP 03

Reset

Identify the one decision,
message, or request that
needs attention now — and
let the rest wait.

***Presenter cue: invite the MHA guest speaker to add one grounding strategy or screening/resource recommendation here.*

Working Caregivers Need Permission to Ask

Ask before the crisis decides for you.

A specific request is easier to answer than a private struggle no one can see.

AT WORK

- Talk with HR, a manager, EAP, or benefits navigator about what is available.
- Ask for practical options: flexible scheduling, leave guidance, remote-work exceptions, or workload triage.
- Share only what is needed to access support; privacy can still be protected.

AT HOME

- Make the support list concrete: transportation, meals, appointment coverage, paperwork, or respite.
- Assign one next task instead of trying to explain the whole caregiving situation at once.

HR Leaders Can Reduce Hidden Strain

Caregiver support works best when it is treated as a workforce system — not as an individual exception.

- 01** Normalize caregiving as a workplace reality
Use consistent language in benefits communications, manager conversations, and wellbeing programming.
- 02** Train managers to respond without overreaching
Protect privacy, avoid judgment, and connect employees to leave, flexibility, EAP, and benefits navigation.
- 03** Audit who can realistically use support
Review access for hourly, frontline, remote-ineligible, lower-wage, and shift-based employees.

When to Talk to *Your* Doctor

- When complex emotions are constant and not occasional “blips” of sadness or anger that pass.
- If emotions are interfering with your ability to work or function daily .
- When there's misuse of alcohol or drugs
- If you're experiencing:
 - Shortness of breath
 - Racing pulse/heartbeat
 - Change in appetite
 - Change in sleep (sleeping more or inability to sleep)

HR's role is to make the pathway to help visible, trusted, and usable before employees reach a crisis point.

Know When More Help Is Needed

Complex emotions deserve attention when they become **constant, overwhelming, or disruptive.**

This slide is not about diagnosing. It is about recognizing when support should move from informal coping to professional help.

WATCH FOR CHANGES THAT INTERFERE WITH DAILY LIFE

- **Sleep, appetite, or energy** changes that persist or worsen.
- **Panic, anger, sadness, or anxiety** that feels hard to control.
- **Work, relationships, or caregiving tasks** becoming difficult to manage.
- **Increased alcohol, medication, or substance** use to get through the day.

Next step: talk with a health professional, counselor, EAP, or trusted care team member when these changes show up.

Immediate danger or thoughts of self-harm: call or text 988 or visit [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org).

If there is imminent risk, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.

HR Leaders Can Reduce Hidden Strain

Caregiver support works best when it is treated as a workforce system — not as an individual exception.

Use one resource as a starting point, then build the support plan around the person, the job, and the moment.

Presenter cue: ask attendees to choose one CAN resource they would use personally or share with an employee this week.

01 CAN Family Caregiver Toolbox

Practical caregiving education, planning tools, and condition-specific supports at [CaregiverAction.org/toolbox](https://www.caregiveraction.org/toolbox).

02 National Caregiver Help Desk

Free access to caregiving experts, hundreds of resources, and community support when caregivers need a trusted place to begin.

03 New resources and caregiver updates

Subscribe through CAN for the latest resources, headlines, and happenings affecting family caregivers.

04 For HR leaders

Share CAN resources through benefits pages, EAP reminders, caregiver ERGs, manager toolkits, and open enrollment communications.

Support Resources

Use these resources when caregiver stress begins affecting health, work, relationships, or safety. Share them as employee self-care tools and HR leader reference points.

For working caregivers

Mental Health America Caregiver Hub

Coping with caregiving stress, crisis planning, treatment and recovery resources, and free confidential mental-health screening at mhanational.org/caregiving.

CAN Caregiver -Ready Workplace Hub

Stress signs, sustainable routines, caregiver support groups, HelpDesk, and workplace-benefit resources.

Immediate support

Call or text **988** for crisis support. Contact NAMI HelpLine: **800-950-6264** or text **NAMI** to **62640**.

For HR leaders

MHA Workplace Mental Health

Employer and employee resources, screening tools, and workplace mental-health guidance for caregivers whose stress is affecting work and relationships.

NAMI StigmaFree employer guide

Survey caregiver needs, reduce stigma, start caregiver ERGs, train managers, normalize flexibility, and connect employees to EAP and leave options.

CAN CRW Programs

The CRW program offers tiered levels of support designed to meet you and your working caregivers, where you are.

A More Caregiver -Ready Workplace

Caregiving does not come with a manual, but it can come with support.

The most effective response is practical, visible, and trusted before a crisis forces someone to ask.

MHA reports 79% of caregiver screeners showed moderate to severe symptoms; NAMI notes 47% of caregivers reported increased anxiety, depression, or related concerns.

01 For working caregivers

Naming what is happening is a strength, not a failure. Asking earlier can prevent isolation and burnout.

02 For HR leaders

Benefits only help when employees know, trust, and can realistically use them across roles and schedules.

03 For the organization

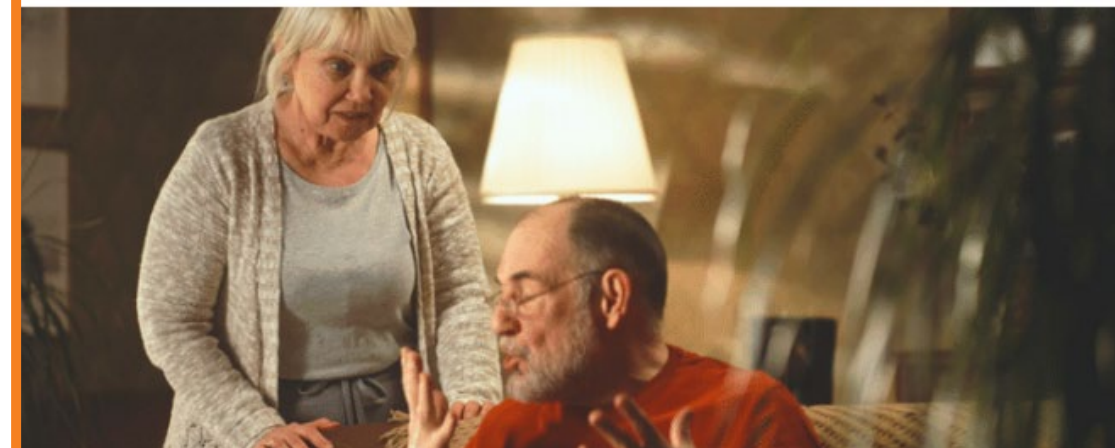
A caregiver-ready culture protects privacy, equips managers, and treats caregiving as a workforce reality.

CAN Emotion -Specific Resources

Understanding Caregiver Burnout And Compassion Fatigue



Managing Anger As A Caregiver: Strategies For Emotional Wellness



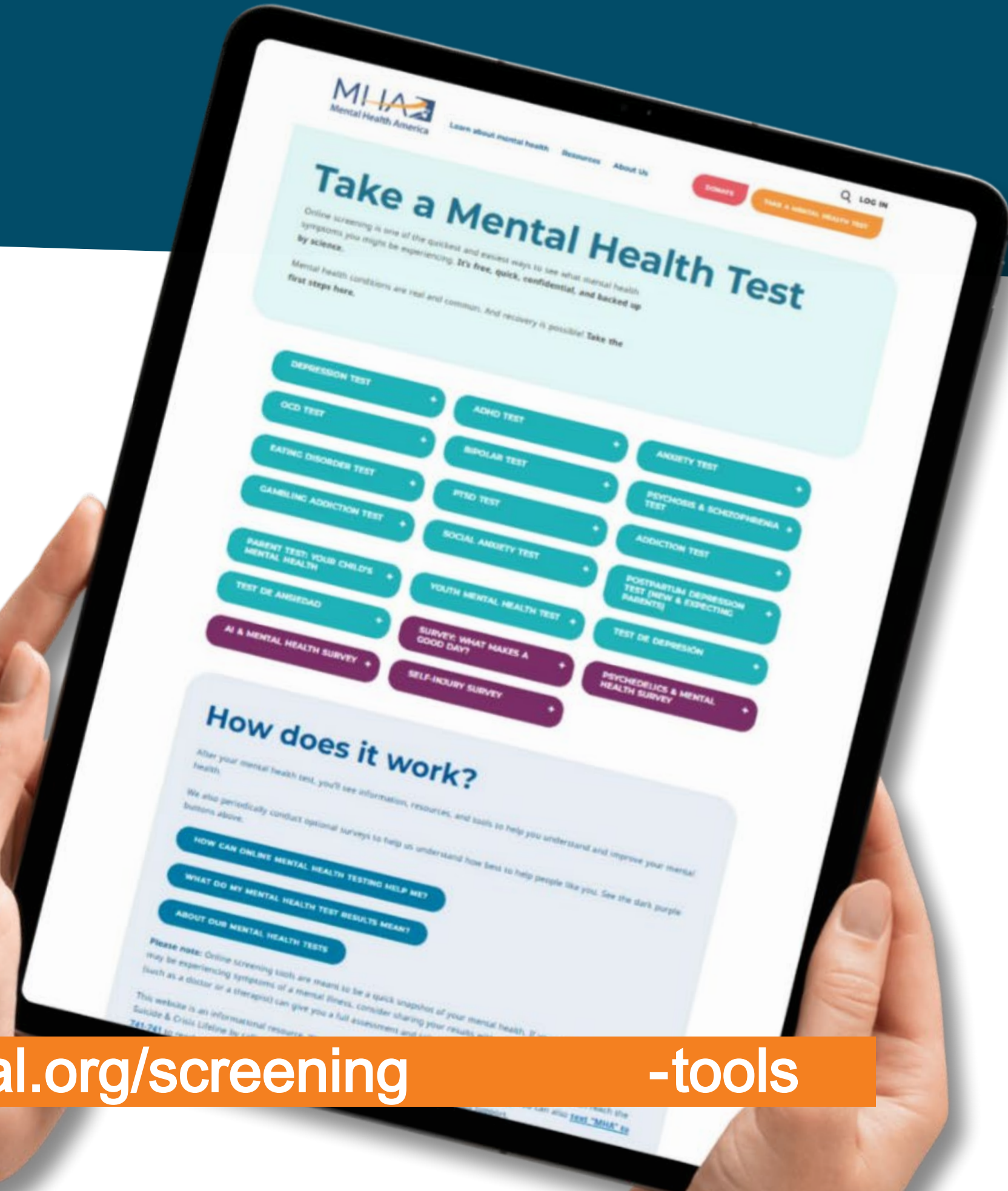
Understanding Caregiver Stress Syndrome & Strategies For Coping



Managing Caregiver Anxiety: Coping Strategies & Support



Mental Health Screener Tool



www.screening.mhanational.org/screening -tools



Caregiver Resources

Caregiver Action Network Family Caregiver Toolbox

CaregiverAction.org/toolbox

The screenshot shows the Caregiver Action Network website's Family Caregiver Toolbox. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for COMMUNITY, DONATE, and CAREGIVER HELP DESK, along with social media icons for Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter. The main header features the Caregiver Action Network logo and navigation links for CARING BY CONDITION, CAREGIVER RESOURCES, ABOUT CAN, and STAY CONNECTED. The central heading is "The Family Caregiver Toolbox". Below this is a search section with the instruction: "Use ONE OR ALL dropdowns to find the resources that best fit your needs. View the results below." The search filters include "IAMA(N)", "CONDITION", and "TOPIC", followed by a "SEARCH" button. Two call-to-action buttons are present: "Call Help Desk. (855) 227-3640" and "More About Caregiver Advocates". The main content area displays three featured resources: "Honor Through Care: Bladder Cancer Support for Military Families" (May 21 - 3 p.m. ET), "Supporting Your Loved One in a Clinical Trial", and "Benchmarks of Care Training: Leadership that Cares: Helping Caregiving Staff Navigate Work Challenges" (July 30 - 2 PM ET). A language selector "EN" is visible in the bottom left corner, and a chat icon is in the bottom right.



*Caregiving doesn't come with a manual.
But it does come with help.*

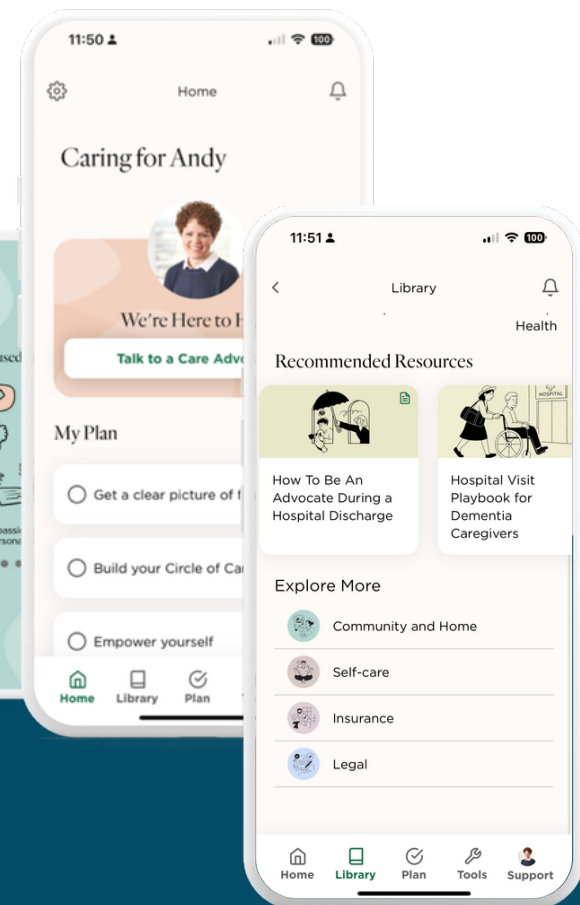
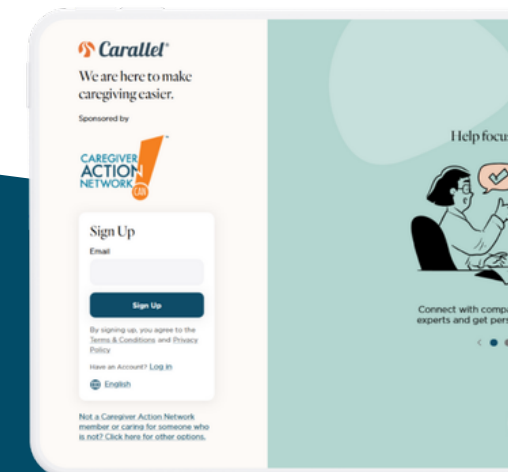
The National Caregiver Help Desk

Get advice from a caregiving expert, easy access to hundreds of resources, and a caregiving community...for free today!



**CAREGIVER
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