

Powerful Tools FOR Caregivers

Program Origins and Development

Powerful Tools for Caregivers (PTC) and all materials were developed over 3 years of pilot testing, refinement and evaluative research to assess the program's effectiveness. Initiated through grant funding, the program has been offered for over 12 years. Currently, over 2,200 Class Leaders have been trained in 36 states. Since the program's inception, Powerful Tools for Caregivers materials have reached over 80,000 caregivers.

PTC is based on the highly successful Chronic Disease Self-Management Program developed by Dr. Kate Lorig and her colleagues at Stanford University. Powerful Tools for Caregivers is a national program sustained by extensive collaborations with community-based organizations.

Brief Description of Caregiver Class Content

In the six weekly classes, caregivers develop a wealth of self-care tools to: reduce personal stress; change negative self-talk; communicate their needs to family members and healthcare or service providers; communicate more effectively in challenging situations; recognize the messages in their emotions deal with difficult feelings; and make tough caregiving decisions. Class participants also receive a copy of [*The Caregiver Helpbook*](#), developed specifically for the class. There is a \$10 registration fee to help defray the cost of the textbook.

Research and Outcomes

Research studies find high rates of depression and anxiety among caregivers and increased vulnerability to health problems. Caregivers frequently cite restriction of personal activities and social life as problems. They often feel they have no control over events, and that feeling of powerlessness has a significant negative impact on caregivers' physical and emotional health. In the years since the program began, a great deal of research, evaluation and revision has been done to ensure its continued value and success. The 6-week PTC class has been shown to have a positive impact on caregiver health for a diverse group of caregivers including rural, ethnic minorities, adult children of aging parents, well-spouses/partners, caregivers at differing stages in their caregiving role, living situations, financial and educational backgrounds. The PTC program is available in English, Spanish, and Korean. Data from class participant evaluations indicates the PTC program improves:

- Self-Care Behaviors: (increased exercise, use of relaxation techniques and medical checkups.)
- Management of Emotions: (reduced guilt, anger, and depression.)
- Self-efficacy (increased confidence in coping with caregiving demands.)
- Use of Community Resources: (increased utilization of community services.)

A significant portion of this class is devoted to looking at how a positive attitude is a key in adjusting to change, making transitions easier, and making the best possible decisions. It emphasizes an underlying theme in all six classes: “We may not have a choice in the changes and decisions we face; however, we do have a choice in our attitude.” An optimistic attitude is one of the most important tools a caregiver can have – a pessimistic attitude makes the job of caregiving even harder.

This last class ends with participants identifying a goal and specific action steps they can take to reach the goal. The participants share what they have accomplished in the six-week class. Leaders emphasize that caregivers are not alone in their feelings and concerns. Contact information for each class we offer will be shared with permission only.

Program Format:

This course is designed to be conducted in 2 ½ hour sessions, once per week, over a six-week period. Each session includes a 10 to 15 minute break. Depending on the time of day a snack or light meal may be provided. Each class has several segments; specific times are allocated to each segment. It is important to maintain these time frames to reach class objectives. It is equally important to attend all six sessions, as each session builds upon previous concepts acquired. Camaraderie develops among group participants; therefore absent participants alter group dynamics.

While this course is educational in nature, the opportunity for class participants to interact and share with each other during breaks is also important. Participants give and receive much needed support through the sharing that occurs. It is for this reason that we ask that you not bring guests to class, or alternate participants attending. It is best to commit to the class when you are able to attend all six sessions. We understand that caregivers experience emergencies – we ask that you notify class leaders if, for any reason, you will be unable to attend any class. We will allow you to take and receive phone calls during the class, should the need arise.

Questions: You may contact a Caregiver Specialist at Aging and Disability Resource Center of the Lakeshore either Kewaunee or Manitowoc County, Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at **1-877-416-7083**.

