

# **POWERFUL TOOLS FOR CAREGIVERS: PROGRAM IDEAS FOR YOUR CONGREGATION**

Submitted by Leslie Congleton

## **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 since 1998. 2,000 Class Leaders have been trained in over 32 states as of 2012. Since the program's inception, Powerful Tools for Caregivers materials have reached over 70,000 caregivers.

PTC is based on the highly successful Chronic Disease Self-Management Program developed by Dr. Kate Lorig and her colleagues at Stanford University. PTC 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.

## **Research and Outcomes**

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 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 check ups.)
- 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.)

## **National Awards**

In 2007, PTC received the National Family Caregiver Award for innovation, responsiveness and effectiveness from the National Alliance for Caregiving and the MetLife Foundation. In 2009, PTC received the Network of Multicultural Aging Excellence Award from the American Society on Aging/AARP. For information about the PTC program: [www.powerfultoolsforcaregivers.org](http://www.powerfultoolsforcaregivers.org)

## **Powerful Tools for Caregivers - Class Description**

### **Class #1: Taking Care of You**

This class sets the stage for the entire course. It emphasizes that the focus is on "YOU, the caregiver, not on the family member receiving care," and that caregivers will develop

a “box of self-care tools.” The challenges of caregiving and significance of caregiver self-care are dramatized through a video. Beginning in this class, caregivers make a weekly action plan for self-care.

### **Class #2: Identifying and Reducing Personal Stress**

Four steps are presented for effective stress management: (1) Identifying early warning signs, (2) Identifying personal sources of stress, (3) Changing what you can change and accepting what you cannot change, and (4) Taking action. Tools to reduce stress are discussed. Participants learn how to change negative self-talk – which increases stress and erodes confidence – to positive self-talk. Beginning in this class, caregivers learn five relaxation activities that are easy to incorporate into their daily lives.

### **Class #3: Communicating Feelings, Needs, and Concerns**

Participants learn how to communicate their feelings, needs and concerns more effectively by using “I” messages. Through brief dramatizations, participants experience the impact of both “I” messages and “You” messages (which tend to sound blaming and put people on the defensive). They practice changing “You” messages to “I” messages, and identifying when statements beginning with the word “I” are actually “Hidden You” messages.

### **Class #4: Communicating in Challenging Situations**

Participants practice two communication tools – assertiveness and Aikido – which are helpful in difficult situations. They learn a four-step process, called DESC (**D**escribe, **E**xpress, **S**pecify, and **C**onsequence) for using the assertive style of communication. With Aikido, participants learn how to align and find “common ground” with a person who is distressed. A segment highlights guidelines for communicating with a person who is memory impaired.

### **Class #5: Learning From Our Emotions**

The overriding theme of this class is “our emotions are messages we need to listen to.” It emphasizes that feelings occur for a reason and that feelings are neither good nor bad. Focus is on identifying constructive ways for dealing with difficult feelings – especially anger, guilt, and depression – and resources for professional help.

### **Class #6: Mastering Caregiving Decisions**

Focus is on the internal emotional process caregivers go through when they experience a life change. Tools for dealing with changes and for making tough decisions – including a seven-step decision-making model and the family meeting – are discussed.

*Leslie Congleton has been a professional in the field of aging/caregiving since 1985. Currently, she is Program Director of Powerful Tools for Caregivers (PTC) in Portland, Oregon. PTC is a self-care education program in 32 states which has reached over 70,000 caregivers. Prior to that she worked with Legacy Health for 22 years as Program Coordinator for Caregiver Services, Project Director reaching out to underserved rural and minority caregivers throughout Oregon; Program Coordinator of adult day respite services and an Outreach Professional. In 2007, she founded Wellspring for Caregivers whose mission is to restore the well-being of caregivers through interactive workshops which combine time for group sharing with gentle yoga practice.*