

# Powerful Tools FOR Caregivers

By Michele Hendrix

Caring for a family member or friend with a chronic condition can be physically, emotionally, and financially draining. This highly effective, evidence-based, self-care education program for family caregivers, builds the skills caregivers need to take better care of themselves as they provide care for others. Caregiver participants learn to minimize the potentially negative impacts of caregiving in a six-week program emphasizing self-care and empowerment. Research on *Powerful Tools for Caregivers* (PTC) has consistently shown increased self-efficacy for caregiver participants.

## **Become a Certified PTC Class Leader**

This two-day leader training prepares and certifies PTC class leaders to successfully co-lead the six-week *Powerful Tools for Caregivers* class series. The training program includes:

- Scripted curriculum for both the caregivers of adults with chronic conditions as well as the caregivers of children with special needs classes,
- Intensive, experiential, and interactive training provided by a team of certified PTC Master Trainers,
- Learning and practicing group leadership and facilitation skills.
- DVDs used in caregiver classes.
- Continental breakfast and lunch.
- One-time certification fee.

Certified PTC Master Trainers will conduct the class leader training so you may bring *Powerful Tools for Caregivers* to your community. Class leaders will be fully prepared to co-lead *Powerful Tools for Caregivers* classes to groups of up to 15 family caregivers.

## **Improve the Lives of Family Caregivers in Your Community**

*Powerful Tools for Caregivers* has served caregivers of adults with chronic conditions since 1998. After successful pilot classes, PTC is pleased to expand the population of caregivers served to include caregivers of children with special health and behavioral needs (including minors and adult care receivers with special needs). Please note separate scripts for these distinct caregiving populations are used. The program's self-care emphasis remains the same. The examples and scenarios with the tools and a new DVD have been tailored to address the specific needs of each caregiver population.

Caregivers benefit from the PTC 6-week series of classes whether they are:

- Spouses/partners of an adult with a chronic condition,
- Adult children of aging parents,

- Parents of children with special health and behavioral needs,
- Grandparents raising grandchildren with special needs,
- Long-distance caregivers,
- In differing stages in their caregiving role,
- From diverse rural, urban, or ethnic communities,
- English, Spanish, and/or Korean speaking.

### **Powerful Tools for Caregivers is:**

- Proven to produce results,
- Easily implemented,
- Attractive to funding sources,
- Based on solid research,
- Comprehensive and well packaged.

### **What do you have to offer?**

Class leaders may be professionals or volunteers from healthcare, social services, or faith-based organizations. Class Leaders are encouraged to enroll as local teams of two but may also team

with previously trained *Powerful Tools for Caregivers* class leaders to conduct six-week class series in their community.

Potential class leaders must have:

- Excellent communication and organizational skills,
- Flexibility, openness, and a genuine interest in facilitating positive change for family caregivers,
- A sponsor organization to support ongoing program sustainability,
- Commitment to co-leading two, 6-week series of classes within a year of becoming trained.

### **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 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.

For more information about the Powerful Tools for Caregivers program go to their website at: [www.powerfultoolsforcaregivers.org](http://www.powerfultoolsforcaregivers.org)

*Ms. Michele Hendrix served as President of POAMN, and is a Master Trainer for Powerful Tools for Caregivers. She has worked for over 25 years to advocate, educate, involve, and motivate people in the process of aging and self-care; and to recognize the connections among church, health care, non-profit, community, state, federal, and local agencies while encouraging adults of all ages in managing their self-care, chronic conditions, respite, and caregiving roles. Michele has focused her work on intergenerational and interfaith programs for adults, evidence-based health promotion, ministry programming and development, respite for caregivers, and fall-prevention programs. She is currently working as an independent contractor, trainer, and workshop leader for AGE of Central Texas/CaregiverU, health care systems, faith based organizations, churches, senior centers, aging networks, and non-profits. Concentrating her efforts to provide programs and resources to partnerships, continuous quality improvement, and ministry and program development to meet the needs of aging seniors and boomers with an emphasis on caregiving and respite care.*