



Program Overview

What is Powerful Tools for Caregivers?

Powerful Tools for Caregivers (PTC) is an evidence-based, self-care education program for family caregivers. Originally developed caregivers of adults with chronic conditions, Powerful Tools for Caregivers has expanded the program to include classes for parents of children with special needs. Below is a general summary of PTC:

- Education program – not a support group
- 6-week series of classes
- Focus on caregiver self-care
- Scripted curriculum
- Train-the-Trainer model

NDSU Extension began the PTC program in May 2013. Today there are 35+ trained Class Leaders offering workshops to family caregivers.



What are the “tools” learned in the PTC Classes?

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. See reverse side for class descriptions.

Why is PTC needed by caregivers?

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.

How does PTC benefit caregivers?

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, and caregivers of children with special needs. 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.)

What is covered in the PTC classes?

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.

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. Guidelines for communicating with a person who is memory impaired are highlighted.

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 information about the PTC program, or about upcoming classes, contact NDSU Extension:

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