







Steps to Managing Stress

1. Recognize warning signs EARLY.
2. Identify sources of stress.
3. Identify what **YOU** can and cannot change.
4. Take action.

Stress

My Warning Signs

My Sources

Results of Neglecting Stress

- Increased health problems
- Disrupted relationships
- "Burnout"
- Depression
- Decreased quality of care

Barriers to Taking Action

- Can't think of what to do.
- Choosing a difficult activity.
- Postponing stress reduction.

Stress Reducers: What I Can Do

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Powerful Tools for Caregivers

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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.

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. 2,900 Class Leaders have been trained in 40 states as of 2015. 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. 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 Recognition

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. In 2012, the PTC program was recognized by the Administration on Aging as having met its highest level criteria for evidenced-based programs.

**For information about the PTC program:
www.powerfultoolsforcaregivers.org**