



The Feasibility and Outcomes of an Asynchronous Caregiver Wellness Course

PI: Dr. Laura St. John (University of Calgary), 2022

PROJECT SUMMARY

Family caregivers had a hard time during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially those caring for someone with an intellectual or developmental disability (IDD). Even before the pandemic, many caregivers were feeling stressed and overwhelmed. COVID-19 made this worse by closing programs and services that many families relied on. It also made it harder for caregivers to take care of their own health.

Online programs can help caregivers who cannot attend in-person events. These programs can give support, teach new skills, and help caregivers feel less alone. There are two main types of online courses:

- **Synchronous courses** happen at a set time. Everyone logs in together, and they can talk and learn as a group.
- **Asynchronous courses** are more flexible. People watch videos and read materials on their own time. But they don't get to talk with others in real time.

This study looked at whether a live (synchronous) online course for caregivers could be changed into a self-paced (asynchronous) course. The study wanted to learn:

1. If the self-paced course was easy to use and helpful.
2. If people would finish the self-paced course and be happy with it.
3. If caregivers learned just as much from the self-paced course as the live course

This 6-week course was created together with caregivers and health professionals and covered important topics like how to talk to doctors, build healthy routines such as sleep, nutrition, and movement, manage stress, sadness, and change, and take care of your own health as a caregiver. Both versions of the course had the same content. The live course included weekly group sessions on Zoom, while the self-paced course sent weekly videos and activities, like journaling, that caregivers could do on their own time.

KEY MESSAGES

Caregivers found the course helpful and gained new skills to manage stress, communicate with health providers, and support themselves and their loved ones.

Feeling connected is important. While the live course felt more social, the self-paced course still helped reduce feelings of loneliness.

Flexibility matters. A self-paced option allowed many caregivers to participate despite busy schedules, though it felt less engaging without group discussions.

Suggestions for Improving Future Course Delivery

1. **Offer both course options.** This gives caregivers more choice and makes programs more accessible.
2. **Match the right person with the right course.** Some caregivers do better with self-paced programs. Others need real-time support. Future programs should help caregivers choose what fits them best.
3. **Keep improving virtual learning.** Future research should explore ways to make self-paced courses more interactive, such as adding discussion boards or optional check-ins