

I Hate Her

An older woman with dementia was living in her home, but there were safety issues. Her family hired a very nice home health aide to come into the woman's home to help with cooking and some personal care. The woman, however, said that she hated the aide, and wanted her out of the house. What should be done?

Who is this person? Is this a woman who always has valued her independence? Does the presence of an aide represent a threat to her independence? Did you ask the woman WHY she hates the aide?

Making use of abilities that remain. She seems to have mobility, cognitive capacity and the ability to communicate. She can see (but how good is her vision?).

Gather the evidence. Does she feel this way about family members who try to help her? Is it specific to this aide? Did it start immediately when the aide first arrived? Has the family tried to have other aides work with her before? If so, did she react to them in the same way?

Use the formula. It looks like this could be either a social environment issue or something about the specific aide. The information obtained when the woman is asked why she hates the aide might help clarify this issue.

Solution. If it is an issue of independence, can the presence of the aide be reframed? Can you say that the aide is there to learn how to do things, and wants the older woman to help her learn how to help people? Can the aide do more to offer choice when offering to provide help to give the older woman a greater sense of control? Is the older woman cognitively intact enough to use a social contract (guarantee of being able to stay in her home in exchange for allowing the aide to help)? Is there something about the aide's physical appearance that brings out an old negative association? If so, try asking the aide to change things in her physical appearance (hair; makeup; what she wears) to see if this changes the reaction.

CLUE: How was the aide's presence explained to the older woman?