

Take it Back

A daughter comes to visit her mother, who lives in an assisted living facility. The daughter takes the mother out to eat at a restaurant. She orders for the mother, and when the food comes to the table, the mother becomes very agitated and they eventually must leave before the meal can be eaten. What should the daughter do when she goes out to eat with her mother?

Who is this person? Did the mother go to restaurants in the past? If not, the new environment could be a cause of agitation. If she did go to restaurants in the past, something that has changed in the mother might be a cause of agitation. How did she handle stress before she had dementia?

Making use of abilities that remain. Can she read? If so, can she read the menu? Can she read the name of the restaurant? Can she recognize different foods (ones she likes and ones she does not like)? Would it be better to take her to a cafeteria?

Gather the evidence. She is agitated by the dining experience. Did you ask her what was bothering her?

Use the formula. If the cause is not physical, it could be a case of overstimulation. Is the restaurant noisy? Is the lighting too low or too bright? Can she see what she is asked to read on the menu? If she is given 2-choice options, does this calm her down? Is she alright when served small portions (like in the case of Too Many Shrimp)?

Solution. Give the older woman choices of where to go, and ask her to write down her choice so that you both can refer to it. Come at a time when the restaurant is not too crowded or noisy. Can a friend of hers join you (if the presence of company produces a good effect)? Give 2-choice options. Call ahead to make sure that the restaurant serves some foods that the older woman likes. Tip the waiter or waitress in advance and insure that you get a quiet table. If none of these things work, consider having a picnic with take-out food instead of eating at a restaurant.

CLUE: The older woman is anxious when she enters the restaurant.