

You Solve the Case

The Cleaning Lady

An older woman with dementia moved into her daughter's home, and now wants to help around the house. But when she "cleans things up," she puts things away and they cannot be found again. What should the daughter do?

Who is this person? It appears as if the older woman has always wanted to be useful and has done housework for many years. However, she now is in a new environment. It also appears that she does not like to ask for help.

Making use of abilities that remain. The older woman is mobile, can grasp objects, has good motor skills and procedural memories, and knows routines regarding housework.

Gather the evidence. What specific tasks is she doing when she "cleans things up?" Where does this take place? Where is she mistakenly putting things away – is there a pattern? Can she read? Can she follow written directions?

Use the formula. Is she bored? If environmental supports are given, such as words or pictures to show where to put things away, can she use the supports successfully?

Solution. Can she be provided constructive activities at the times that she tries to "help"? Can she work as a team with the daughter? Can the mother use external aids to successfully complete the tasks and put things away in the right places? If the mother could do this, would the daughter still have a problem with the mother doing housework (who owns the problem)?

CLUE: Why does she put things away in the wrong place?