

Dear PAC Consultant,

My grandmother, who has dementia, recently moved into an assisted living community specifically designed for people with similar problems. One thing I have noticed when I go to visit is that she is often in her room by herself, and she doesn't want to come out. I ask her if she wants to go join in the activities, and she says no. Always no. When I ask the staff what she does all day, they tell me she will only come out of her room and participate in an activity if one particular aide (Nancy) asks her. That's it. Why is she being so stubborn? Can't the others *make* her go to the activities? The place is very expensive and she is not getting her money's worth. Besides, she used to be involved in so many things ... this is just so upsetting! What can we do?

- ***Granddaughter from Grand Rapids***

Dear Granddaughter from Grand Rapids,

When a person you love changes in ways that make her seem like she is not who she used to be, it can generate some strong emotions. And, understandably so. I am very sorry.

So, let's put our explorers' hats on and see what we might be able to discover. We will start with the staff, since Nancy actually **has** been successful. I wonder why that is. Does Nancy ask her in a particular way? Might your grandmother have a trusting relationship with Nancy that she doesn't have with the others? How might you check this out?

Another topic of exploration is the type of activities in which they and you are wanting your grandmother to participate. Has she ever liked those types of activities? If so, is she still able to do them successfully without being frustrated or embarrassed? If they are activities that she has never done or liked, is it reasonable to think she will agree to do those now? Does she feel like she fits in with the other residents who are participating? Has she made any friends in her new community? Think about a time when you may not have wanted to go to something, and only went because a trusted friend invited you to go. Once you got there and participated, you probably (hopefully) had a great time, but if given a yes/no choice by someone you didn't know or trust, it likely would have resulted in a no. So, I just wonder if some of these may be contributing factors.

Finally, when you think about her personality, in the past has she preferred to socialize in big groups, or is she more of a small group person? I know you said she used to be involved in so many things. Did those things involve many people or few? Also, did she

enjoy doing activities that were full of meaning and purpose (like volunteering, taking care of someone, or something else), or did she tend towards particular hobbies (like gardening) – or a combination? Was there something in her life that often made her happy – like music or animals? When you think about all of these things and compare to what she is being expected to do, might it provide you with some clues as to what is going on?

So, as you think about this, what next step might you take to help your grandmother engage more fully in life in her new community?

Sincerely, PAC Consultant

Carolyn Lukert, MBA, CGCM joins the Positive Approach® to Care (PAC) team as a PAC Certified Independent Consultant, Coach, and Trainer. As a care partner in her own family, and as a care manager in private duty home care and in senior living communities, she brings a broad perspective to her roles with PAC. Carolyn balances her time between Rhode Island and Florida, where she provides support to families where dementia is present. She also is very involved in staff development and organizational culture change relative to the care of individuals living with dementia.