



In the Pediatric Hospital

# DELIRIUM

## in CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS

### WHAT IS DELIRIUM?

Delirium is a change in a person's thinking or behavior caused by changes in how the brain is working. It happens commonly in hospitalized patients, even babies and kids.

*Parents often say: "This is not my child."*

### SYMPTOMS

A delirious person may experience:

- Confusion, not knowing where they are, or who you are
- Saying mixed up things
- Inconsolability, emotional upset that may not respond to usual soothing
- Difficulty paying attention or remembering things
- Sleep disturbance (too much or too little sleep)
- Reversed day/night cycle
- Behavior or emotions that are different than usual: aggressive, watchful, suspicious, apathetic or withdrawn
- Seeing or hearing things that aren't real but seem very real
- Agitation, restless movements, pulling out lines or other important medical devices
- These signs may fluctuate (come and go)
- Memories of these experiences of confusion can be frightening



## CAUSES

Delirium may be caused by:

- The underlying illness
- Infection
- Medications, such as those needed to calm or manage pain
- Disruption of the sleep-wake cycle
- Chemical changes in the brain
- Less oxygen to the brain
- Drugs and alcohol intoxication and withdrawal

**DELIRIUM USUALLY CLEARS UP AS THESE CAUSES ARE TREATED OR REMOVED.**

## MANAGEMENT

Your child's mental status will be closely monitored by your nurse and the team. Delirium usually clears up as the causes are identified and addressed. Changing medicines, improving oxygen levels, and looking for infections may all be part of treatment. While addressing these things, your child's doctors may recommend one or more medicines to help with symptoms of delirium. Your child's nurse will help make the room calm and help your child get on a good sleep routine, which will help his/her delirium.

## HOW TO HELP

- Be calm and reassuring at the bedside
- Remind your child gently where s/he is, what time of day it is
- Provide familiar things such as a favorite blanket, stuffed animal or comforting music
- Don't argue with a confused child
- Distract child to happier thoughts/images
- Provide glasses or hearing aids if needed
- Help keep your child safe during any episode of agitation
- Encourage getting out of bed and being awake in the day, longer stretches of sleep at night
- Take care of yourself so you can be there for your child
- Explain to your child later if s/he has questions or remains distressed about confusion or hallucinations