

Delirium in the Intensive Care Unit

A Guide for Families and Caregivers

What is delirium?

- A common medical condition caused by temporary changes in brain function.
- Occurs in approximately 1 in 4 sick children
- Although *typically* short-lived (hours to days), it is useful to know what it looks like and what you can do to best support your child support your child is useful.

What should I look out for in my child?

PLEASE NOTIFY A NURSE OR DOCTOR IF YOU OBSERVE ANY OF THESE SIGNS.

- Unusual and quickly changing moods
- Difficulty understanding and speaking
- Not recognizing places, familiar people and things
- Reduced eye contact and tracking of objects and people
- Disrupted sleep patterns
- Seeing or hearing things that others do not

Why is it important to identify if my child has delirium?

Delirium can lengthen your child's hospital stay. It can also impact mental (e.g., anxiety, depression) and physical health (e.g., fatigue, coordination) following hospital discharge.

How can you best support your child when they are delirious?



Remain calm; use simple, short sentences.



Create a peaceful but engaging environment (play music, bring their favorite toys, etc.).



Continue with usual daily care routines (e.g., brushing teeth, bathing).



Remind the child gently of where they are and who you are.



Provide in-person or online social interaction opportunities.



Encourage your child's early movement and mobility with the support of your health-care team.



Provide noise-reducing devices (earplugs or headphones).



Be sure your child has their glasses or hearing aids.



Opening/closing the window blinds or turning room lights on/off during the day/night.

Additional resources



1. Kelty Mental Health website
2. Vanderbilt PICU delirium overview, screening sheets, and videos
3. Vanderbilt post-intensive care syndrome overview
4. Caregiver Action Network for more information on self-care

These resources are for educational purposes only. Please discuss any questions regarding your child's health with your healthcare team.