



Wonders & Worries

Professional support for children through a parent's illness or injury.

We will, together.

EXPLAINING DELIRIUM TO CHILDREN & TEENAGERS

WHAT IS DELIRIUM?

Delirium is a temporary change in how the brain works that can happen when someone is very sick, near the end of life, or affected by medications or infection.

A person with delirium may:

- Seem confused or disoriented
- Say things that don't make sense
- Forget where they are or who is in the room
- See or hear things that aren't really there
- Become restless, scared, or agitated

Important to remember: Delirium is caused by the illness affecting the brain. It is not intentional, and it is not who the person truly is.

WHAT CHILDREN NEED TO KNOW

Child life specialists encourage parents to focus on these key messages:

- Delirium happens because the body and brain are very sick
- The behaviors or words are not personal
- The person is not "going crazy"
- Love and connection still exist, even if they don't look the same
- It's okay for children to take breaks or step away

HOW TO TALK ABOUT DELIRIUM: A SIMPLE FRAMEWORK

01

Name It

"This is called delirium."

02

Explain It

"The brain is tired and mixed up."

03

Reassure

"This is not your fault and not about you."

04

Prepare

"Here's what you might notice."

05

Invite Questions

"What are you wondering about?"

WHAT YOU MIGHT SAY TO PREPARE YOUR CHILD



"You may notice that Mom is more confused or says things that don't make sense. This can feel surprising or even scary. If that happens, you can always come get me or take a break."

COMMON QUESTIONS CHILDREN ASK

Does this mean they don't know me?

Even if it seems that way sometimes, the love and connection are still there.

Is it permanent?

Sometimes delirium comes and goes. It's part of how sick their body is right now.

Are they in pain?

The medical team is working to keep them comfortable. Delirium can look scary even when someone isn't hurting.

HOW CHILDREN & TEENAGERS CAN COPE

- Short visits are okay
- Sitting quietly or holding a hand is enough
- Talking about familiar people or memories can help
- Leaving the room is allowed

Loving someone does not mean staying when it feels like too much.



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THE MOST IMPORTANT REASSURANCE TO REPEAT

"Delirium is something the illness is doing to the brain. It is not who your parent really is."

AGE-SPECIFIC SCRIPT CARDS

YOUNG CHILDREN (APPROX. 4-7)

"Because Mom's body is very sick, her brain gets tired and mixed up sometimes. This is called delirium. When that happens, she might say things that don't make sense. This is not your fault, and she still loves you very much."

SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (APPROX. 7-11)

"Dad's illness is affecting his brain. This is called delirium. It can make him confused or forgetful. If he says something strange or upsetting, that's the delirium talking — not how he really feels about you."

TEENAGERS (APPROX. 12-18)

"You may notice that Mom seems confused or unlike herself at times. This is called delirium. It happens when illness or medications affect the brain. It can come and go. If she says something hurtful or doesn't recognize you, that's the delirium — not your relationship with her."

PERMISSION SCRIPT (ALL AGES)

"You are allowed to take breaks. You can leave the room, ask questions, or choose how much you want to be involved."