

HOW TO PREVENT AND SUPPORT DELIRIUM IN AN OLDER ADULT IN HOSPITAL OR A CARE HOME, WHEN YOU CAN'T VISIT IN PERSON

There may be times when you can't visit an older family member or friend in the hospital or a care home because of distance, a contagious disease or outbreak. Your presence in their life is still very important, even if you can't be with them in person. In addition to information that the care team has shared about delirium, these tips can help when you visit by phone or video call.

5 TIPS FOR ALL CONVERSATIONS

- 1 Introduce yourself by name and by your relationship** at the start of the call. For example "Hi John, it's your friend Kevin"
- 2 Help orient them to place, day, month, and time** early in the conversation. For example "I'm sorry that I am not able / not allowed to come visit you right now at Sunnybrook Hospital. It's hard to believe that it's already Tuesday, March 25th, isn't it?!"
- 3 Remind them of healthy ways** to prevent delirium or get better from it, such as drinking enough, staying active, and wearing their glasses and hearing aids. For example "To feel as best you can, drink something regularly and work with your healthcare providers to participate in as much activity as possible. Also don't forget to wear your glasses and hearing aid"
- 4 Focus on things that are familiar, stimulate their mind, and bring up good memories:** talk about activities they enjoy, read short stories or poems, provide updates on family, play or sing a song, and tell them where you are to help them visualize familiar settings. For example "I'm in the living room, sitting in your favourite blue chair. Would you like me to play ____ (favourite song) or sing with you?"
- 5 Smile!** They will hear it in your voice even if they can't see your face and will be reassured.

5 TIPS FOR WHEN THE PERSON HAS DELIRIUM, IS CONFUSED OR AGITATED*

***If the behaviour is new, and the care team has not informed you that the person has delirium, let them know right away that the behaviour is not normal for them.**

- 1 Use a calm voice and reassuring words.** For example "I can tell that you aren't feeling well / are afraid. It's going to be okay. You are sick right now and doctors and nurses are looking after you to help you feel better. All of your family know you're at the hospital. We are not able/allowed to visit you in person right now, but we all care about you very much, and are here by phone for you."
- 2 Keep conversation simple,** and ask questions that only require a "yes" or "no" answer. For example "Are you having a good day?" (instead of "how are you?")
- 3 Be a good listener, and acknowledge how they are feeling.** If their answer to "Are you having a good day?" is "no," try something like: "I am sorry that today is not a good day for you so far. I hope that it gets better. Is there anything that we can talk about that might make you feel a little better?"
- 4 Be patient:** give them time to reply.
- 5 Don't persist in correcting them if it seems to make them more upset.** Instead, try asking questions to validate their confusion or fear. For example "Why are you asking about _____?"