WHAT IS DELIRIUM?
Delirium is a physical state when the brain cannot send or receive information correctly. Many of the physical changes of a dying person can cause delirium:
- Infection, fever
- Constipation
- Dehydration
- Electrolyte imbalance
- Medication side effects

WHAT MIGHT YOU OBSERVE IN DELIRIUM?
Sudden changes in person’s cognition & behaviours:
- Difficulty focusing, paying attention
- Difficulty remembering or sorting out
- Difficulty communicating thoughts & needs
- Disturbed sleep-wake cycle
- Difficulty reasoning or problem solving
- Fear, paranoia

HOW MIGHT YOU IDENTIFY DELIRIUM?
Confusion Assessment Method is a screening tool developed to identify delirium:
1. Acute onset and fluctuating course, and
2. Inattention, and
3. Disorganized thinking, or
4. Altered level of consciousness

PREVENTION IS MORE POWERFUL THAN TREATMENT
- Be alert for early signs of delirium
- Report and record:
  - Delirium episode
  - History of delirium
  - History of traumatic themes
- Provide a quiet, familiar, safe environment
- Maintain person’s daily routines
- Support consistent staffing
- Offer liquids, especially when receiving opioids

SUPPORT MEASURES DURING DELIRIUM
- Personal safety – avoid physical restraints
- Emotional safety – presence of family / companion
- Orient the person to reality
- Reassurance
- Support during hallucinations
- Arrange for spiritual support
- Coach through relaxation

SUPPORT MEASURES WHEN DELIRIUM STOPS
Support for the family:
- Recognize family’s anticipatory grief of loss
- Listen to their concerns
- Provide reassurance – their loved one is not ‘crazy’
- Provide space for rest
- Provide comfort items, e.g. warm blankets

Reference: Murray, Katherine (2014) Integrating a Palliative Approach: Essentials for Personal Support Workers. Life and Death Matters Ch. 4H