

## LISTENING

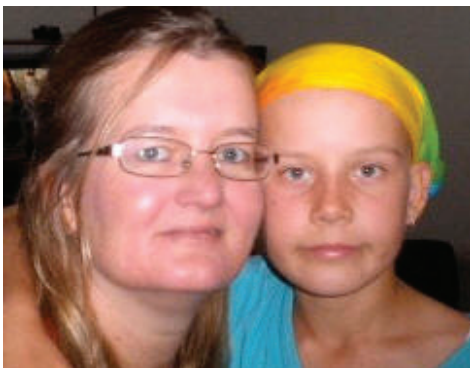
### How do I, as a parent, deal with a child with Alopecia Areata?

Parenting a child with Alopecia Areata can be difficult and stressful for both parent and child. Two things need to be kept in mind;

- Children can be much more resilient than we give them credit for. They are generally optimistic, but fear of acceptance is real, with the expectation for rejection or ridicule.
- Children take their cues from the adults in their world, and particularly from you, as a parent. If you express their hair loss as a source of anxiety or sadness, they can internalise those feelings.

This does not mean that you should ignore or repress your own feelings of loss, sorrow, and anger when you are trying to cope. In addition, parents should know that feeling guilty about somehow being responsible for your child's hair loss are natural and to be expected. But children with Alopecia Areata don't blame their parents.

Parents need to remember that as their children grow, their acceptance or non acceptance will fluctuate. A ten year old who seems totally accepting of their Alopecia Areata can turn into a thirteen year old who is unable to cope. Embrace the changes and allow them to make the choice to wear or not wear head coverage.



### What are the most important things to keep in mind as a parent?

Help your child to accept they have Alopecia Areata.

Coping mechanisms offer a way to make something bad better. They represent a way to relieve emotional conflict and anxiety. They also make for a healthier, well adjusted individual. But it is especially difficult to adjust when the hair falls out quickly. Acceptance allows you to work out your problems more effectively. Once you have gained acceptance of yourself, others will follow but this is a gradual process. Some people just feel different throughout their whole lives. The roller coaster ride may make them feel embarrassed, awkward, self-conscious and even angry. Before accepting the condition, it is OK to grieve for your hair. Sometimes it feels good to cry. You can still miss your hair every now and then, this is normal.

Whenever possible, include your child in conversations about their Alopecia Areata with other people.

Building support networks among parents, friends and school is important, but this has to be done in conjunction with the child, and needs to be repeated as the child's journey alters with Alopecia Areata.

### What other materials and resources are available to me as a parent?

Refer to the AAAF web site section "Parent Support Page".



Australia Alopecia Areata Foundation Inc.

## For Parents of ALOPECIA AREATA Children



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# PARENTS TALKING TO PARENTS ABOUT ALOPECIA AREATA

## EDUCATING

### What is Alopecia Areata?

Alopecia Areata is a condition which results in the loss of hair on the scalp and body. It usually starts with one or more small, round, smooth patches and may or may not progress further.

Alopecia is not contagious. It is not due to nerves. What happens is that the immune system attacks the hair follicles (structures that contain the roots of the hair), causing hair loss. This disease occurs in males and females of all ages equally, but most often presents in those under 25.

When a child presents with Alopecia Areata, as a parent you will be asking yourself "how will the condition affect my child physically and emotionally"? "What can I do to help them"? "What treatments are best for them"? "Should they wear head coverage"? "Who should we tell and how do we tell them"? Overwhelmingly you will want to protect them.

Each person brings to their journey different ways of thinking about their life, and must adjust to different emotional experiences and social environments accordingly. The emotional aspects of living with hair loss, however, can be challenging. Many people cope by learning as much as they can about the condition; speaking with others who are facing the same problem; and, if necessary, seeking counselling to help build strategies towards a positive self-image.

Having Alopecia Areata does not reduce life expectancy and it should not interfere with the ability to achieve such life goals as going to school, playing a sport, working, marrying, or raising a family.

All children with Alopecia Areata have one thing in common – they want their hair back.

## UNDERSTANDING

### Everybody reacts differently to having Alopecia Areata?

Understanding that no one is to blame, that nothing you or your child has done has caused this is the first step. The second step is working out together how you want to tackle this journey.

This journey affects everyone in the family unit. Strategies need to be worked through on how to answer questions about the hair loss. Make yourself receptive to anything they ask, not what you want them to ask. Allow them to make decisions that affect them, such as how to tell others.

Each situation your child will find themselves in will call for a different strategy. Sometimes humour is the right thing, sometimes empathy, sometimes only a hug or smile will do the job.

We can be confused, angry or upset when confronted with comments like –"it's only hair". Often the way people around them react influences them and your reaction to unwanted staring or unkind words may not be how they want the situation handled.

Your child is going to have to deal with this at their own pace. Both the experience of losing hair and the physical changes occurring can be traumatic and overwhelming. You are there as a resource, a sounding board and an educated friend. You need to be honest. Children need to know that they can trust you and rely on you for information and support.



## SENSITIVITY

### What factors affect how a child will react to having Alopecia Areata?

Many factors determine how a child will react to getting any form of Alopecia Areata. The position of the first patch, gender, age, peer groups, their personality, life experiences are some examples.

Having Alopecia Areata tends to make a child become more self-conscious and concerned about how others view them and how they "fit in". For adolescent children this strong tendency to analyse themselves is projected onto others, to the point that they feel "on stage", and believe that even the slightest physical difference or flaw is noticed by others. Children can withdraw themselves from participating in peer activities.

For both boys and girls, being involved in a variety of activities helps them focus less on their appearance and more on things over which they have some control such as academic performance, music or sports.

It is important to build self esteem by always emphasizing that losing one's hair does not alter who they are. The condition does not affect their intelligence, kindness or humour.

If a child feels good about themselves and has at least one skill in which they excel, the odds are increased that they will deal successfully with these difficulties.

