

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 feelings of guilt about somehow being responsible for your child's hair loss are natural and to be expected. But it is obvious from the brochure written by **CHILDREN WITH ALOPECIA AREATA** that they **DON'T BLAME THEIR PARENTS**.

Can children change how they are dealing with Alopecia Areata?

Parents must remember that the ten year old who seems totally accepting of their condition can turn into a thirteen year old who is unable to cope with Alopecia Areata or wearing a hairpiece.

What is the most important thing to keep in mind as a parent?

Sensitivity and listening to how your child's thinking is affecting his/her emotional reactions will do a great deal for the parent-child relationship, as well as to help be an effective parent of a growing child with differing needs, views, worries, and hopes.

Is it important to give information on Alopecia Areata to my child's school?

Yes. It is important to educate the administration, teachers and fellow students of your child about Alopecia Areata.

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

The Victorian Alopecia Areata Support Association has letters and articles about parents and children, brochures and a bi-monthly newsletter.

Alopecia Areata Support Association (Vic) Inc.

P.O. Box 89,
Camberwell, 3124
Ph: (03) 9513 8580



PARENTS TALKING TO PARENTS ABOUT ALOPECIA AREATA

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What is Alopecia Areata?

Alopecia Areata is a common condition which results in the loss of hair on the scalp and elsewhere. It usually starts with one or more small, round, smooth patches and can progress to total body hair loss, which occurs in males and females of all ages, but young persons are effected most often.

UNDERSTANDING

Do children react differently than adults to Alopecia Areata?

A twelve year old boy and a forty year old woman may share the fact that both have lost their hair, but each brings to the encounter different ways of thinking about his or her life, and must adjust to different emotional experiences and social environments.

Does the age of the child with Alopecia Areata affect how they react?

Yes, the impact of hair loss is more or less significant to children depending on their age.

How do children before the age of five react?

Very little. Alopecia Areata may have little impact, if any, on the children before the age of five. The preschool child is so busy exploring their world, acquiring skills, and gaining independence, that their appearance is virtually immaterial to themselves and their peers. Their hair loss may be an interesting anomaly, and nothing more. And, most likely their peers will not take much notice of their difference.

SENSITIVITY

How do children 6 -12 react?

Between the ages of 6 and 12, children have gained experience and interacted with enough people to grasp the idea that views of the world differ, and that it is important to pay attention to what others think and feel. While this ability to see things as others do helps children to become more empathetic and considerate, it also tends to make children more self-conscious. Children at this stage of development are much more concerned about how others view them, how they may differ from others, and whether others might be making fun of them. Since children at this age have become so aware of individual differences, they unfortunately are more likely to poke fun at those who don't fit their definition of "normal".

Even if a child has had Alopecia Areata since infancy, he/she now faces new problems of adjustment. Peers are becoming a more significant part of their life and the desire to "fit in" is becoming stronger. Even a child with a very healthy self-concept may feel threatened. However 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.

Do teenagers have a hard time dealing with Alopecia Areata?

Alopecia Areata can be especially hard on teenagers. By the time a child enters adolescence, self-consciousness reaches a peak. The teenager has acquired new cognitive skills which enable them to think much more introspectively. 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. The adolescent desperately wants to blend in with the group, and avoids public ridicule or criticism at all costs. For girls in particular, a stylish, natural-looking hairpiece can be important. For both girls and boys, 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, musical, or athletic skills.

LISTENING

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

Parenting a child with Alopecia Areata can be difficult. Parents of children with alopecia areata need to keep two things in mind. 1) Children can be much more resilient than we imagine. They are generally optimistic, and don't have the expectation for rejection for ridicule that adults may have because they haven't experienced or observed it as much as adults have. 2) Children take their cues from the adults in their world, and particularly from you, as a parent. If a child sees that his/her hair loss is a source of anxiety or sadness for you, they will internalise those feelings.