

Paediatric Psychology

# Alopecia – Dealing with questions and staring

Guide for children and young people



## Dealing with questions



People often ask questions about things they've not seen before because they are curious – they are not trying to upset you. We are all curious about what we see around us! Having a plan ready will make you feel more confident and able to cope if someone does ask you a question.

Below are some ideas that may help you deal with the questions. You might like to practise some with a friend or someone in your family. This will help you test out which feel best for you, and you might decide to say or do different things in different situations. Practicing will also help you feel and act confidently. This will help the other people feel more relaxed too, and realise that having alopecia is 'no big deal'. Then you can get on with the important stuff of getting to know them!

**Try reassuring them that having alopecia isn't a big problem:**

*"It's just the way my head is, it's ok, it doesn't hurt, you can't catch it."*

*"You've noticed that I have no hair – I've got alopecia but I'm fine."*

**Try changing the subject:**

*"It's the way my head is.  
Did you watch the match last night?"*

*"I've got alopecia but I can still play rugby.  
Do you like rugby?"*

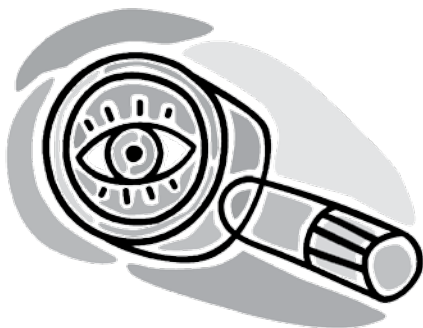
*"I've got alopecia. What did you do yesterday?  
What are you doing today?"*

**Try to explain it to other people the best way you can:**

*e.g. "I've got alopecia and this means that your hair just falls out. It just happens to you. It doesn't hurt, you don't even feel it."*

## Coping with staring

For the same reason that people ask questions, they may also stare. Sometimes we all get caught out staring! It might be useful for you to think of staring as a question that someone wants to ask but doesn't know how. They are probably staring because they have never seen someone with alopecia before.



Just like when people ask questions, **having a plan ready** can really help.

**It may be that you want to ignore them. In this case:**

- Walk away
- Turn your body away
- Look away

You might want to let them know that you have seen them staring, and that you want them to stop. So try:

- Looking at them and smiling or nodding

or saying

- "I'd prefer it if you didn't stare at me."

It might be that this person looks friendly and you want to talk to them. Try answering that 'unasked question' about your alopecia and start a chat. For example:

*"I've got alopecia.  
Have you ever met anyone else with alopecia?"*

## Talking to your class



Some people find it helpful to talk to their whole class at once about alopecia and answer people's questions in one go. This can be helpful, with the support of your teacher or parent.

Some people have found it helpful for teachers to talk to all classes in the school before you start so that other children know about your alopecia and accept it.

## Further information

You may find the following website helpful:

**<http://www.headzup.org.uk/>**

This is a website for children and teenagers with alopecia.

## Further support



If you would like to talk to someone about managing your alopecia, you can be referred to the Paediatric Psychology Department at the John Radcliffe Children's Hospital through your doctor.

This leaflet has been written and designed by Dr Louise Dalton (Consultant Clinical Psychologist), Spires Cleft Lip and Palate Service. It has been adapted for young people with alopecia by Dr Loretta White (Paediatric Clinical Psychologist) and Ben Gordon (young person with alopecia, aged 9).

If you would like to talk about anything in this leaflet or would like to be put in touch with another young person with alopecia, please contact:

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If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221473** or email **PALSJR@orh.nhs.uk**

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