



# ALOPECIA AREATA GUIDE FOR PARENTS



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## PARENTS CAN HELP THEIR CHILD LIVE WITH ALOPECIA AREATA

Children, even teens, often take cues from their parents – although the teens will be unlikely to admit it! If your child sees you feeling sad, anxious, or angry about the alopecia areata, they may mimic your reactions, often internalizing them. If your child thinks you feel guilty, they may feel guilty themselves for putting you in that situation and end up in a cycle of self-blame.

Children are also quite resilient. They may take their situation in stride and cope quite well if they have support. It is also normal for children to feel sad or angry about their hair loss and these feelings shouldn't be ignored, even if they are usually happy and easygoing. The important thing is that they have support as they try to navigate the world around them.

**Listen** – listen to what your child says about their hair loss. Ask your older child if they want solutions or if they want to vent. Few things are more frustrating than a parent trying to solve a problem when the child wants to talk.

**Talk to them about options** – talk about the options available to them, such as head coverings, hairpieces, and so on. But don't push what you would do. Let your child decide and leave the option open that their decision is not permanent. They can change their mind.

## SCHOOL AND ACTIVITIES – WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM

The adults in your child's life should know about their condition unless they have specifically asked you not to say anything. Teens may not want you to tell anyone, or they may want to do it themselves. But generally, teachers, coaches, and adults who spend time with your child should know and be educated on AA. They may need to step in if there are any problems with the other children or your child may want to talk to them, to have another person to confide in about their disease.

## CONNECT WITH NAAF

NAAF is the voice of the alopecia areata community, serving the nearly 7 million Americans affected by this autoimmune disease, which causes unpredictable, often sudden and severe hair loss. Frequently dismissed as a cosmetic condition, alopecia can be a deeply traumatic experience, resulting in emotional and economic pain and social isolation. It is not just hair.

A catalyst for driving research, support, and awareness, NAAF empowers the community with more choices to embrace or live free of alopecia areata. We connect the patient, medical, and scientific communities to drive research and treatment development, raise awareness to reduce stigma, and provide support to improve lives.

Founded more than 40 years ago by volunteers, NAAF serves as the voice of the alopecia areata community. Join us today and help amplify our voice!

## CONNECT WITH US

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Everyone copes with a disease like alopecia areata (AA) in different ways. The same thing goes for parents of children with AA. The sudden onset of the disease and the randomness of when and where hair is lost and may regrow can be frightening and challenging for everyone.

Some children develop alopecia areata at an early age, so it's all they know. Some begin losing their hair when they start school or as teens, times when they are trying to gain independence and discover who they are. As a parent, you are trying to learn how you feel about it, how you react to it, and how much support your child needs. Part of this will be learning when to allow your child the freedom to figure things out on their own and when to step in, or if your child's behavior is due to hair loss or being at that stage of maturity. You may feel overwhelmed and powerless sometimes.

Aside from learning as much as possible about AA, you can do two other things to help your child manage their disease. The first one is to answer their questions honestly. This is important because they need to be able to trust you. The other is to constantly affirm to your child that their hair, or lack of it, doesn't define who they are or the type of parent you are. It is a part of your child's journey in life.



## WHAT IS ALOPECIA AREATA?

Alopecia areata is a common skin disease. The word alopecia means bald, while areata means patchy. It can cause hair loss on just the scalp, or it can also affect the face, and other body areas, like under the arms or on the legs. People with alopecia areata often lose hair in circular, coin-sized patches on the scalp, but in more severe cases, they may lose all of their hair. It is an autoimmune disease, which means the body's immune system mistakes healthy tissues as dangerous and begins attacking them.

*Alopecia areata can affect anyone, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, or gender, but it often first appears in childhood.*



### ALOPECIA AREATA IN CHILDREN 5 & YOUNGER

When children are pre-school age, they tend not to feel any impact of their hair loss yet. They are too busy exploring and learning about the world around them and gaining independence. They don't seem even to notice that they have alopecia areata. It may be interesting and other children may ask about it, but it doesn't take center stage in their life.

### OLDER CHILDREN WITH HAIR LOSS, FROM 6-12

Once children have started first grade, they begin to notice differences in people and they engage in new experiences. If they haven't yet, this is likely when the children start paying attention to what other people do and say about them. Other children may point them out or laugh – making the child feel self-conscious. An adult may make a comment that the child can hear.

Children with AA who feel good about themselves have an advantage if these things occur. If your child has a good foundation and they feel good about themselves, they have a better chance of staying strong if faced with difficult situations. Being part of a group of friends is also helpful. They can be allies when things get tough.

But, as your child gets older and enters the teen years, behavior and acceptance of the hair loss may take a sudden and sharp change – seemingly overnight in some cases. This is to be expected as they enter those often confusing teen years.

### TEENAGERS HAVE A LOT TO NAVIGATE

The teenage years can be a challenging time for both teens and the adults in their lives. They are no longer young children, but they aren't adults yet. They are starting to think more introspectively, trying to identify who they are and where they fit in the world. They tend to analyze what they believe others are thinking about them.

Most teens desperately want to blend in, avoiding public criticism or ridicule. Teen girls are often very involved in making their hair “just right.” But teen boys also do the same thing. They just may not be as obvious about it. For some teens, how their hair looks can make or break the day ahead. Understanding their need to feel good about themselves is essential. Stylish wigs or hairpieces can go a long way in boosting self-confidence.

Keeping teens busy in various activities can also help increase self-esteem and give them something – music, sports, clubs, etc. – they have some control over. It's important to keep in mind though, that some activities are harder on appearance than others. For example, a teen who chooses to wear a wig may have difficulty finding one that stays on during gymnastic routines or any physical activity that could cause the wig to get loose.

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