



Guide to vitiligo for 7-11 year-olds

This guide helps you understand what vitiligo is. It will suggest some ways for you to answer questions about it. We hope it will also help you with any worries that you may have about having vitiligo.

What is vitiligo?

Vitiligo means having white patches on your skin and sometimes your hair. Lots of people have it, you are **not** the only one! It does not hurt you. You cannot give vitiligo to anybody else.

Why do people have vitiligo?

This is a difficult question to answer because scientists and doctors do not know everything about vitiligo yet. People can be born with all sorts of different conditions, or they can develop them later. There are two important things to remember:

1 everybody is different. If you think about the other children in your class, they all look different. They will have different hair, eyes, noses, mouths and skin. Some will be tall, others short, and so on. No two people are the same. We are all unique, looking different and being different in many other ways too.



2 **how you look is only one part of who you are.** Your personality is very important. You may be usually happy and like being with other people, or you may be quite a serious person and enjoy being on your own sometimes.

People like doing different activities, for example some children will like doing sport, others will like painting and drawing more. Also, people find different things easy, like maths, writing and using computers. There is no right or wrong way to be, we are just different! Always remember your difference is just one of the things that make up all the fantastic qualities that make you who you are.

What can I do if other children look at my vitiligo patches?

If you have vitiligo on your face, remember that people may be looking at you for more than one reason. They may be talking to you and looking at the expression on your face, to work out what you are thinking. Looking at someone's face is a way of showing that you are listening to them, or it may be a way of communicating an idea to them.

However, people do look more at other people when they are different or special in some way. Often when people look for this reason, they are just being curious, maybe because they have not seen vitiligo before.

- You can tell yourself **it is OK for people to look**, especially if they are giving you a **smile** at the same time.
- **Looking is OK but staring is not.** However, sometimes people stare and they do not even realise they are doing it.
- If you think someone is staring at you, **try giving them a quick smile.** This is a way of letting them know that you have noticed their stare. They may be embarrassed and think before they meet you next time.



**What can I say
if someone asks
about vitiligo?**

When you look a bit different, you may be asked questions. You may find it difficult to answer questions at first, but don't worry - you are not alone. When someone asks you a question about vitiligo, and you feel like answering it, here are some tips:

Explain what vitiligo is simply:

You could say,

***"It's just the way
my skin is"***

or

***"It's called vitiligo and
it affects my skin."***

People don't really need to know any more, unless they are a friend and you would like them to know more.

Reassure them that vitiligo does not hurt:

People may be concerned about you, so you could say:



***"It's just a condition on my skin.
Don't worry - it doesn't hurt me."***

Reassure them that they cannot catch vitiligo:

To stop the person feeling worried about vitiligo, all you need to say is:

***"It's called vitiligo,
it's not catching."***

If someone is asking too many questions,

- **Try distracting their attention.**
- **Distraction involves changing what you are talking about.** You can turn the conversation around by asking them a question about themselves. This takes the attention away from you, **like this for** example:

Peter: *Hi, what's your name?*

Amelie: *Amelie, what's yours?*

Peter: *It's Peter. Why does your skin look like that?*

Amelie: *It's just the way my skin is. It's called vitiligo.*

Peter: *When did it happen? Will it go away?*

Amelie: *I am not sure, but what lesson have you got next?*

Peter: *I have maths.*



If you do not feel like answering any questions, you can just say:

“Would it be OK if we talked about this another time? I don’t really feel like answering questions today.”



What can I do if other children are being unkind about my vitiligo?

You may, unfortunately, meet children who are unkind about people who are different. They are often people who feel sad about themselves for some reason. These people are bullies and may pick on other children who are different in some way - for example, because they wear glasses, or are very short, not only because of having vitiligo. But there is **no excuse** for anybody to make you feel unhappy or upset about your vitiligo.

If you ever have a problem with someone making you uncomfortable or upset, you need to tell your teacher, or another adult. This adult should talk to the person who has made you unhappy, or ask someone else to do this. Your family will want to know if something has happened at school, so that they can help you too.

What can I do if I am feeling sad or worried?

Everybody feels sad or worried at times. As we are different people, we deal with feelings differently. You may be someone who likes to be on your own when you are feeling sad. However, remember:

- It is usually best to **talk** to someone and share your feelings. This may be a friend, a parent or another adult, for example your teacher.
- It may help to have a **self motto**, something that you can tell yourself when you are feeling sad or worried about something. You could say something like:

***“I am great
just the way
I am,”***

or

***“I can deal with this
because I know I am
OK.”***

Use your self-motto when you find yourself in a difficult situation, maybe when you have been asked to read something out aloud in class.

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