

COPING WITH QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

LAURA'S STORY

Laura has been invited to a summer party and really wants to go. She's been worrying about what she should wear for weeks. She has a lovely dress which would be perfect but she has large patches of psoriasis on her elbows and a few on her legs and she feels she can't cope with people asking her questions or saying things like 'That looks sore'.

She feels miserable because she knows if she wears trousers and a long-sleeved top, she'll feel out of place as well as hot and uncomfortable all night.

In the end, she wears the dress with a jacket over the top. She hopes no-one will notice the skin on her legs but someone does and they ask whether she's been bitten by mosquitoes. Laura feels herself welling up with tears. She blushes with shame, answers no, and then excuses herself. She spends the next fifteen minutes in the bathroom dabbing at her eyes and wondering whether to go home. In the end she stays but stands in the corner and avoids eye contact. She doesn't have much fun at all.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

- How does unwanted attention affect you?
- Does it make you want to avoid going places or wearing certain clothes?
- Do comments or questions make you feel nervous and clam up?
- Do you worry about all the attention will being on you and your skin and feeling unbearable?
- If you answered yes to any of these, you're not alone and there are things you can do to help.

EXERCISE

Write down an explanation, reassurance and distraction.

1. My explanation:

2. What I say to reassure:

3. How I'm going to distract and move the conversation on:

Practice saying it out loud. Look in the mirror and rehearse the conversation. Practice with a friend and take turns playing the different roles.

3 STEP STRATEGY

Step 1

Prepare a short and simple explanation like "I have psoriasis. It's an autoimmune condition that affects my skin." You might want to keep it shorter, "I have a skin condition",

Step 2

Add some reassurance like "I'm looked after by the hospital for it". But you could say, "It looks sore but it feels okay" or "I've had it a long time and it doesn't bother me".

Often the unwanted attention is driven by concern and you just need to reassure the person asking.

Step 3

Take control of the conversation. You might think this bit would be hard but it's easy if you're prepared. You may choose to talk about your psoriasis if you want and that's fine. But if you want to turn the attention away from your skin, then the next you should do is to change the direction of the conversation and distract attention away from your skin.

Say something like, "Have you been here before?" or "Did you watch the game last night?".

It may feel jarring to change the conversation so abruptly but it will work.