Face blindness in the workplace

Supporting workers with face blindness

UNIVERSITY of STIRLING

What is prosopagnosia (face blindness)?

- Prosopagnosia, also called face blindness, is a neurodevelopmental condition recognised by the NHS. It is a difficulty recognising and remembering faces. This can include the faces of family and colleagues. Around 1 in 50 people are born with the condition but it can also occur after a stroke or brain injury.
- Face blindness is a bit like dyslexia, but for faces. People with face blindness may sometimes recognise some faces, but often they mix people up or just don't recognise them. Their brains work differently when it comes to recognising faces.
- Prosopagnosia is a standalone condition. However, it also often co-occurs with other forms of neurodivergence, such as autism, ADHD, or dyslexia. Around 30% of autistic people are faceblind.

People with prosopagnosia would like colleagues and employers to know:

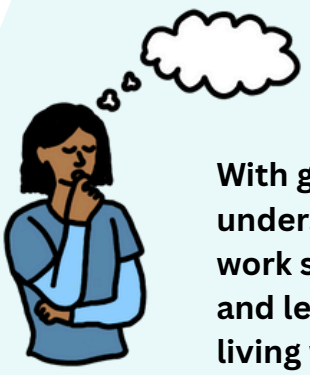
If someone with face blindness doesn't know who you are, it's not because they're being rude or not trying. There is no cure or treatment. They can't just "try harder" to recognise faces.

When you have prosopagnosia, recognising people often requires intense mental effort. This can be mentally draining and physically tiring.

The condition is specific to facial recognition and does not affect a person's intelligence or general memory.

Once someone with prosopagnosia realises who a person is, they can usually remember past conversations, shared experiences and other related details without difficulty.

In some cases, prosopagnosia also affects the way faces are visually perceived. For instance, people may struggle to tell whether someone is male or female, or may not notice differences in skin tone, age, or facial features.



With greater awareness and understanding, you can help make work situations more comfortable and less stressful for someone living with prosopagnosia.

Sources of reliable information about prosopagnosia:

- nhs.uk/conditions/face-blindness
- www.faceblind.org.uk
- www.faceblind.org
- faceresearch.stir.ac.uk

How to support someone with prosopagnosia (and anyone who has difficulty recognising faces)

For colleagues:

Name cards on desks or large name badges are helpful in the workplace, in meetings and at events. Make the name badges double-sided if using lanyards and ensure they are clearly visible. If you can be proactive in making these small adjustments this takes the pressure off the face blind person.

Let face blind people know if you change your appearance—e.g. if you change your hair, grow a beard or get new glasses. They might rely on those things to recognise you.

Use a realistic, up-to-date profile photo on the staff directory and platforms such as Teams. If you usually wear glasses at work, wear glasses in your profile photos.

Ask how you can help. Everyone experiences the condition differently, so it's best to follow the person's own advice or preferences.

Before an in-person meeting, it can be helpful to send a quick message describing what you'll be wearing and where you'll be ("I am sitting by the window, wearing a red jumper"). Say your name and context when you greet them —for example, "Hi Alice, it's John from HR."

If you're with a face blind person and someone else comes over that you both know, you can quietly tell them who it is or greet that person by name.

For employers, line managers and HR:

Avoid hot desking. If this is unavoidable, use large name cards on desks.

Educate staff about the condition. Can you include face blindness in disability awareness induction materials? Or any staff information on neurodivergence?

Always check whether the person is willing to disclose their condition to others before considering doing so yourself.

Be aware that some tasks, such as verifying ID, may be impossible for someone who is face blind.

Prosopagnosia is not well as well-known as other forms of neurodivergence.

ACAS has information on making your organisation neuroinclusive. Much of their advice would also be helpful for prosopagnosia.
www.acas.org.uk/neurodiversity-at-work

For further information or to express interest in taking part in future research please contact:
Dr Jud Lowes, University of Stirling.
Email: judith.lowes@stir.ac.uk.

- Responses were collected as part of Judith Lowes' PhD *Objective and Subjective Experiences of Developmental Prosopagnosia*, awarded by the University of Stirling, 2025. Funding was provided by ESRC and a Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellowship to Anna Bobak (ECF-2019-416)

- Jud wrote a news article for The Conversation about experiences of living with face blindness that some people have said was useful to share with friends and family: www.theconversation.com/even-mild-face-blindness-can-cause-serious-difficulties-in-daily-life-new-study
- The full research paper on which this fact sheet is based can be freely accessed here: https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0322469 Lowes., et al (2025). PLOS ONE, 20(4), e0322469.
- Further factsheets in this series are available free of charge from https://faceresearch.stir.ac.uk/prosopagnosia/

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