

Supporting pupils with face blindness at school

Advice for teachers

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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, teachers and friends. Around 1 in 50 people are born with the condition but it can also occur after a stroke or brain injury. There have also been reports of prosopagnosia following Covid-19.

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 face blind.

"For a long time, I had no friends at school because I didn't know who anyone was."



Facts about prosopagnosia for teachers:



It is rare for prosopagnosia to be diagnosed, or identified, in school aged children. In the UK it can be difficult, or impossible, to get a formal diagnosis. In children, the condition is usually identified by parents.



Children may not be aware of their face recognition difficulties since they often use cues like hair, shoes, schoolbags, or voice to identify others. Often, they don't realise that most people find it very easy to recognise familiar faces.



If someone with face blindness doesn't recognise you, **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 someone has 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 child's intelligence or general memory.

How to support a pupil with prosopagnosia



Name cards on desks or large name badges are helpful in the classroom and at events. Make sure names are clearly visible. If you can be proactive in making these small adjustments this takes the pressure off the pupil with face blindness.



Try to keep consistent seating plans. These can help face blind children learn who sits where.



Try to wear something distinctive every day, like a badge, ribbon, or lanyard.



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



Identify yourself by name at the start of every class and when you meet the child in the corridor or playground.



Regularly use all children's names throughout the day, and the whole school year (e.g., “Jack, you sit at this table and work with Ellie [point to Ellie]”).

Outside the classroom



“At playtime I stood in a corner or ran in circles. I was bullied and I didn’t know who had hit me.”

- Arrange with the parent or carer how to safely hand the child over at the end of the day. Seek parental advice on how to manage school trips.



- Be aware that some tasks, such as handing out books to classmates or taking a message to another teacher may be impossible for a face blind child.

- A face blind child may struggle to find their friends in the lunch hall or playground. If they know they can ask a staff member to discreetly point out their friend(s), this can be very helpful.
- Always check whether the child and their parent/carer are willing to disclose their condition to others before considering doing so yourself.

Sources of reliable information about prosopagnosia:

- The NHS website: [nhs.uk/conditions /face-blindness](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/face-blindness)
- The UK not-for-profit group Face Blind UK: www.faceblind.org.uk
- University research groups such as www.faceblind.org and University of Stirling faceresearch.stir.ac.uk

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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