

Living with face blindness:

Information for young people

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What is prosopagnosia (face blindness)?

Face blindness (officially called prosopagnosia, pronounced "pross-oh-pag-NOH-zee-uh") is a condition recognised by the NHS.

It causes difficulty recognising and remembering faces.



"It makes it quite hard to make new friends in a situation, like senior school, where you chat to someone fairly briefly and don't then see them again for a few months. I forget that I've met them already. This can mean I ignore people that I've had a friendly chat with previously".

Face blindness is a bit like dyslexia, but for faces. It's not all-or-nothing, you don't just either recognise faces or not. Face blind people might sometimes recognise some faces, but often they mix people up or can't work out who they are. Their brains work differently when it comes to recognising faces.

Recognising people when you have prosopagnosia often requires a huge mental effort, which can be tiring. You might not realise how hard your brain is working to recognise other people.

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



"My teacher asked me to show some pictures to another teacher, and I went to the wrong one."

Face blindness is not a problem with eyes. Faces can be seen clearly. It is a difficulty in how the brain processes them.

Face blind people use context (e.g. where they see a person, or what they are talking about) as well as clues such as hair or clothing to help them recognise others. So, meeting someone out of context (e.g., bumping into a school friend in a shop) makes recognition much harder.

If someone with face blindness doesn't know who someone is, it's not because they're being rude or not trying. They can't just "try harder" to recognise faces.

The condition only affects how faces are recognised. It does not affect a person's intelligence, or memory for facts or objects.

Living with face blindness: What can help?

We asked other face blind people about the things they did to help them to recognise others.

Memorise things a person often wears (shoes, watch, piercings, a schoolbag, or clothes). These might help you narrow down who it is.



They said the most helpful things were:

Pay attention to how someone walks. Often people have a quite personal way of walking that, once you notice it, can help you work out who they are.

Find out before you meet a person what they will be wearing and look for their clothes.



If meeting up with someone, be the first one to arrive and let the other person find you.

Ask a friend or family member to tell you who a person is (this only works if they are with you at the time!)



Make notes about people e.g. "Sarah has long blond hair, a thin nose and a gap in her teeth" to help you remember them. You could keep notes on your phone so you can check them.

Try to memorise voices. Everyone's voice and way of talking are different. Listening to how they speak can often help to identify people.

More information on face blindness:

NHS website <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/face-blindness/>

These ideas will not help everyone, or work all the time, but they might be worth trying to see if they help you.

For further information or to express interest in taking part in future research please contact:

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- 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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