

Prosopagnosia - Information for Family & Friends



Prosopagnosia or **face blindness** is a neurological condition which affects about 2% of the population. It results in severe difficulty recognising other people by their faces.

One of the most effective ways of coping with the stress of living with prosopagnosia and the difficulty of recognising familiar faces is the support of a family member or friend. So we've put together some ideas of how you might best be of support.

First and foremost check out with the individual what might help them, but here are a few suggestions:

Meeting up with family or friends

It may seem strange to think that your own partner or close friend can have difficulty recognising you, but's be reassured it's neurological not personal! However for the prosopagnosic, this situation can still be quite anxiety provoking. So how can you help?

- Text ahead to describe what you're wearing
- Be very specific about where you're meeting
- Greet the other person so that they can hear your voice
- Do give due warning if you decide to shave off your beard or dye your hair green!

When out and about together

- If you meet someone you both know in the street, make a point of using their name "Hello John" and give clues "How is Jake getting on at his new school".
- Whisper the name of the person you meet as they approach.
- Remember that each time the same person appears, for example at a party or a conference, the person with prosopagnosia may be facing another 'stranger' – unless they're perhaps wearing something very identifiable.
- You might want to discuss which films at the cinema would be particularly challenging - period dramas with lots of characters can be a nightmare. (At home, be prepared to help identify characters in TV shows etc)

In a crowd

It's very easy for someone with prosopagnosia to lose you in a crowd. Even losing sight of you for a moment can break the continuity of recognition, which can be quite unnerving.

- In a market, on a beach, at a conference or getting on a train etc where you're coping with mingling in crowd, remaking contact, with just a quick word, can be very reassuring.
- Be aware that an occasion like a wedding, where all the bridesmaids are dressed the same and the men are in dark suits and ties, can be especially challenging.
- Wearing a familiar coat or scarf (though perhaps not on a beach!), a badge or brooch etc can help provide one of the vital clues that prosopagnosics learn to rely upon.
- And if all else fails ... you could always dye your hair bright green!!

At home

Understanding the condition may help you to understand the way the person with prosopagnosia behaves.

- Navigating social situations (whether it's at work or leisure) and trying to remember all the clues that may (or may not) help to identify a sea of 'strangers' can be very tiring and leave the person quite tired at the end of a busy day of mixing with others.
- Someone who appears shy when out and about can be much more animated at home, or in a one to one situation.

A final message on behalf of all those with prosopagnosia

It's hard to explain the disorientation that can come with severe difficulties in recognising faces, because it's a skill that comes so naturally to others. Moreover it's not something that gets better, so thank you for being patient and know that your understanding is much appreciated and can make a huge difference.

Face Blind UK is keen to help raise awareness and develop understanding of prosopagnosia, so if you would like more information or have ideas to share with others please contact us via the www.faceblind.org.uk

