

# Information for Family & Friends



## Living with Prosopagnosia

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 partner or friend. If that's you, then we have put together some suggestions of how you might best be of support.

## Meeting up

It may seem strange to think that your own partner or a close friend can have difficulty recognising you, but please be reassured it's neurological not personal! However, for the prosopagnosic this situation can still be quite anxiety provoking. Here are some simple things that you can do to help.



- Text ahead to describe what you're wearing.
- Be very specific about where you're meeting.
- Do give a wave, but don't be surprised if the prosopagnosic doesn't respond - they may well think you are a stranger waving to someone else behind them.
- Greet the other person so that they can hear your voice.

## When out and about together

If you see someone you both know, whisper the name of the person you meet as they approach. Make a point of greeting the person by name "Hello John" and give clues to who it is: "How is Jake getting on at his new school".

Remember that each time the same person appears, for example at a party or conference, the person with prosopagnosia may be facing another 'stranger' – unless there is something particularly distinctive about them.

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. Just a quick word can help the person with prosopagnosia to find you again.

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 in a heatwave!), or a distinctive watch or piece of jewellery can provide one of the vital clues that prosopagnosics often rely on. And if all else fails you could always dye your hair bright green!

## Meeting unexpectedly

This is a prosopagnosic's greatest challenge and can lead to the most awkward encounters.

Walking down the street, some prosopagnosics appear to be distracted or daydreaming, when in fact they may be trying to avoid offending a neighbour or a friend by blanking them accidentally. Other people with face blindness may do the opposite and smile at almost everyone they pass, just in case they might know them, but a nod and a smile may not mean they recognise you.

Out of context you may need to give more than just your name, 'Jo' or 'Sam' may still leave the prosopagnosic sifting through everyone they know. Introducing yourself as 'Jo from Pilates' or 'Mary from work' can really help.

## At home

Understanding the condition may help you to understand the way the person with prosopagnosia behaves, even at home.

- 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 can leave the person exhausted 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. Their apparent shyness may not be a personality trait, just a learned cautiousness in social situations.
- Following TV programmes can be challenging. You might want to discuss which films at the cinema might be particularly challenging (such as period dramas). Be prepared to help identify characters or even pause the programme to help the person with prosopagnosia catch up with who's who.



On the whole being at home with just a few family members will be relatively easy for the prosopagnosic to deal with, but do remember to give due warning if you decide to shave off your beard..... or dye your hair green!

## **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, especially since 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 we're grateful that you understand.

*For more information on prosopagnosia please email [info@faceblind.org.uk](mailto:info@faceblind.org.uk)*

**Face Blind UK - [www.faceblind.org.uk](http://www.faceblind.org.uk)**

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