Strategies for Living with Prosopagnosia

These comments highlight the strategies that children developed to compensate for difficulty with face recognition. Many of these strategies are reports from adults, reflecting back on their experiences as children. All strategies mentioned by families were reported, even if they weren’t always successful.

Use Clothing, Voice, or Hair as an Identifier
♦ “In grammar school, everyone wore uniforms (only 30 students in a grade level) so I never really noticed [clothing] till I went to public high school. Then there was 300 plus in a grade and no uniforms. That is when I would remember what my friends wore.” - Parent & Adult
♦ “Social problems have been the main problem for my son. He uses hair and voice characteristics to identify people. He can usually find his friends. When he had trouble with a kid on the playground in elementary school or later in the halls at middle school, it was difficult for him to identify the person or even understand if it was the same person from day to day.” - Parent

Make meeting plans
♦ “I have always made it a point to ‘Meet somewhere’ at a spot instead of ‘at the restaurant’ etc.” - Parent & Adult

Create a secrete sign!
♦ “The only way I ever made friends was to have a ‘secret sign.’ Our gang wore the sign every day (it was a safety pin with colored beads on it--each girl had a different colored bead). Then they pretended not to notice someone if that person did not have their ‘secret sign’ on. That was the only year I had friends.” - Adult
♦ “I wonder if you could buy a bunch of safety pins and different beads--maybe a completely different bead for each kid. Then have each kid wear those at school--it is less "nerdy" than name tags.” - Adult

Avoid using names
♦ “I’d sometimes be caught out not knowing names of people that I saw ALL the time. I’d feel rude when they all said ‘Hi, [my name]’ and I just said ‘Yeah, hi, guys’” - Adult

Befriend the wall flowers
♦ “I tended to hang back and let other people make friends. Those without friends at the end of the first day of class were generally because they were different somehow and I was able to latch on to that to identify them later. Because they didn’t usually have other friends, they were more likely to seek me out later on, too.” - Adult
Take notes of the people you meet
♦ “Carry a notepad and fake a wee, go to the toilet and write details and names of people. E.G. Bob has hair that covers his ears. Is brown LIKE MY DOG, etc You must clarify the brown, otherwise next week you’ll read it and think ‘brown hair describes everyone here’.” - Adult

Appear busy
♦ “Say ‘Hi!’ and be super cheerful and fun but only for 20 seconds and quickly move on, as if [you are] going somewhere anyway... It removes a need to chat.” - Adult
♦ “[My son] has become an avid reader... He carries around a book almost everywhere he goes and uses it as a coping strategy. He says that many people won’t stop and talk to him if he’s reading because they don’t want to bother him. If they do stop, the book gives him something to talk about long enough to figure out if he knows them.” - Parent w/ 10-year-old

Wait for others to approach you
♦ “It worked. When I was ten. But this strategy reduces the quality of friends you can choose from... You remove your choice, your ability to surround yourself with good people of your choice.” - Adult

Look up and keep your eyes off the floor when you walk
♦ “[You have more time] to see faces approach, and to see if the face [is] smiling as if they’re about to say hi, or not, and you can be prepared to greet a friend or a ‘stranger/friend’. It’s much nicer. You feel more connected with society and I’ve noticed when I do the school drop off, a lot of mums smile at me because I’ve been smiling around at everyone.... This makes me feel good. A bit anxious, because something social might be expected of me [if I know them], but happy to be making an initial connection.” - Adult and Parent

Advice to children
♦ “Be aware that people tend to sit in the one seat all year. [It is] a useful way for learning who people are. If you sit in the one chair you’ll be able to [better] learn who you sit next to.” – Adult
♦ “A stranger could be a friend with a haircut... [so don’t] be rude. People [you] know might be watching [you do something embarrassing, but] inversely, [you] should have fun in public and not worry about being uncool or childish, because... you’re never going to see them again anyway. That’s become my new joke mantra and it always makes me relax when I’m feeling shy, now.” - Adult

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It is simply words of wisdom from individuals and parents based on their personal experiences for you to adapt as you see fit.