

INFP

(About 4.4% of the U.S. population)

If there is a single word that defines this type, it is *idealist*. As Introverted-Feelers, they discover their ideals through a subjective interpretation of the world, and then put those ideals to use by helping others. They seek personal fulfillment by performing noble service to aid society.

INFP Personality Highlights

INFPs strive for self-identity, self-knowledge, and self-definition. “Who am I?” is an all-important question and a never-ending quest.

- Their **Introversion** fosters inward reflection and contemplation.
- Their **iNtuition** ensures an endless sense of the possibilities to be found within themselves.
- Their **Feeling** guides them to reflect on how such potential could benefit themselves and others.
- Their **Perceiving** keeps them easy-going, flexible, and adaptable.

This makes for a reserved but warm and gracious type who is frequently comfortable to let everyone “live and let live.” It is only in the area of values that INFPs can become somewhat controlling; this happens when they feel something personally important has been violated.

Here are some other characteristics. INFPs...

- Have strict, perfectionist, self-imposed codes for how to live, but don’t need to impose those codes on others.
- Tend to be easygoing and congenial. They have a “live-and-let-live” attitude toward others.
- Are respected by others for their inner strength.
- Value interpersonal harmony. They prefer to fit in rather than create waves, as long as their values or ideals aren’t violated.
- Can be demanding and aggressive in challenging what they perceive as injustice, striving to create a better situation for others as well as themselves.
- May be perceived as personally complex and giving mixed signals – usually gentle and pliant, but becoming harshly rigid when their values are threatened.
- Can easily make martyrs of themselves.
- Resist being labeled and often do things to shake up the way others view them. They can be unpredictable, even outrageous.

INFPs in Personal Life

Introversion can plague INFPs’ relationships; they may feel far more love and warmth than they are able to express. In relationships involving INFPs, there will be growth, affirmation, and self-fulfillment for everyone involved. But sometimes the Introversion and Feeling combination – and their need for

harmony – causes INFPs to avoid disagreements, which they see as inevitably unpleasant. This can result in a buildup of unresolved concerns and conflicts. In addition, INFPs tend to conduct internal debates and then spring their conclusions on others. This can lead to the perception that an INFP's decisions are cast in stone and not open for discussion.

If you offend an INFP's value system, you may not know about your "offense" until well after the fact and forgiveness may be very slow in coming. The INFP's Introverted-Feeling side may never forgive or forget. But their imaginative, flexible side (iNtuition-Perceiving) will continue to give off accepting, easygoing, "It's okay" messages. If you apologize to an INFP and hear, "It's okay, it was nothing," you cannot automatically assume the matter is settled.

INFPs at Home

In general, home and family relationships are more relaxed than rigid; schedules are subject to change based on others' immediate needs. INFPs prefer to give in to others rather than argue points that may lead to disharmony. However, they may impose strict rules and schedules if they feel their "codes" or values are being violated.

Family events for an INFP are an expression of the essentials of life, and a lot of energy may be directed toward celebrations such as birthdays, anniversaries, or graduations. Loyalty and service to the family can keep an INFP a "child" at any age and always close – psychologically, if not physically – to their parents and family.

INFPs have many little piles of "to-do's" lying around. Neatness often takes a back seat to interpersonal warmth and affirmation, except when company is expected. Then perfection emerges in the desire to serve others well. INFPs tend to relish retirement because the little piles of to-do's they have been amassing for years can finally be rearranged, pondered, and completed. They live their post-career life with the same intensity they once reserved for family and career. They may approach retirement with particular joy if it allows them to leave a traditionally structured career or job in which they had little freedom. Externally relaxed, they continue to be internally driven by a call to serve humanity in some way.

INFPs as Children

As children, the INFPs' deceptively easygoing nature may lead others to take them for granted. Generally, they are tender and sensitive to the world around them and often give in to others at the expense of their own needs. If such self-sacrifice is not appreciated or, even worse, is criticized, they can become sullen and self-critical, over-personalizing every remark. The potential for martyrdom begins early. INFP children:

- Can spend a disproportionate amount of time daydreaming and being preoccupied with inner thoughts.
- Have a high need to please parents and be recognized for their efforts.
- Are often good students and expend a lot of energy to please their teachers.
- Excel in high school and college, even in subjects they don't enjoy.
- Have a high potential for self-doubt and self-criticism.

INFPs as Parents

An INFP parent may focus on a few carefully cultivated values. If these are respected, the INFP parent is typically easygoing, positive, affirming, and quick to meet a child's needs – a friend in whom a child can confide. However, they may be slow to give overt, positive strokes because they find it difficult to express approval. Also, they may not provide the structure and organization that a child needs.

INFPs in Professional Life

INFPs are most productive when their effort reflects some ideal or service and is clearly aligned with their personal values. Work performed for the sake of a paycheck, or meaningless routine, can make this type listless and even rebellious. However, even tasks they don't like can be fulfilling if they see the work as having higher meaning. For example, learning computer programming for its own sake, while initially stimulating, will quickly wear thin. On the other hand, if that skill with computers is used to teach or serve others, it can be endlessly stimulating and satisfying.

INFPs as Leaders

There are few INFPs to be found in hard-charging executive positions. However, when it happens, senior-ranking INFPs can generate fierce loyalty among their subordinates. They usually do a good job of blending productivity with compassion for the workforce. Those who work for INFPs enjoy the freedom to develop personally; receive generous affirmation; and find a ready, willing, and supportive ear for almost any idea. Even if you try and fail, your INFP boss will affirm and encourage you for your effort. On the other hand, you will find it's hard to have creative disagreements and open conflict is likely to be suppressed.

Their leadership style is characterized by passion about causes, values, and ideals. While they enjoy working independently, they work effectively with small groups who are engaged in activities related to values they hold most dear. Their natural strength of perceiving and acting on intuitions about others' needs may become a weakness if they seem unable to make tough decisions or confront problem associates and direct reports. This can result in inefficiencies and lower productivity for themselves and the team.

INFPs usually assume leadership positions in an effort to merge their idealistic vision with some sense of accomplishment. When that happens, they can be highly inspirational leaders, though routine details can be a bore and lead to their undoing. Thus, one often finds INFPs in positions of power in the realm of movements or institutions focused on social causes. Think of some cause, such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), in which one person is the driving force promoting something better for a group. That person is almost always an INFP.

INFPs as Employees

When INFPs are part of the front-line workforce (i.e., not in leadership positions), it is only necessary that they find personal meaning in their work to be motivated.

As coworkers, INFPs may stand by if you perform your job poorly. “It’s none of my business and you’ll pay your own dues” is a typical INFP mind-set. But if your behavior has a negative effect on them, they may respond by becoming quite (though somewhat subtly) controlling. Like other Perceiving types, INFPs may not even be aware that you’ve stepped over that fuzzy boundary line until it happens. Combined with their Introversion, which makes direct confrontation difficult, this can make life frustrating for both you and your INFP coworkers. You may never know how deeply they feel about something. Just be aware that it’s possible for this otherwise congenial and flexible type to suddenly become rigid and unyielding.

INFPs’ Workplace Stressors

Conflict is stressful to INFPs and they don’t like to openly deal with disagreements. Their surface-level tolerance and easy-going acceptance of others may cover a very sharp judgment or opinion. INFPs, in their genuine desire to let others develop and be independent, are often torn between using direct influence (because the issue is important) and gentle persuasion (so that the person involved feels empowered). Others can perceive the behavior generated by this internal conflict as being manipulative and devious. The INFP’s four-letter opposite, the ESTJ, is likely to be the one most offended.

When the workplace becomes too toxic or negative the INFP can become restless or uneasy, falling into the avoidance patterns typical of Feeling types. Tardiness, hypersensitivity, and mediocrity may surface. All of this can grow into wild swings between sullenness and raging criticism, often accompanied by previous “baggage” unrelated to the current situation. (“And that’s not all! I’ve also had it up to here with...”). This behavior is uncharacteristic for an INFP, and it indicates the presence of one or more stressors. If not checked early, this stress can fester, eventually escalating into bouts of illness. Minimize these problems by offering INFPs a listening ear. Encourage them to talk through their issues, although these Feeling Introverts may find this difficult to do.

Because of their intellectual astuteness, competence, and idealism, INFPs do well “climbing the corporate ladder.” These characteristics fit well with their high need to serve others, but are in conflict with their equally high need for perfectionism. This can result in “workaholism,” with INFPs over-extending themselves in tireless (and perhaps thankless) efforts for the organization. This leads to severe self-criticism because, in the INFP’s mind, there is never enough time and the job is never done quite right. They can become martyrs, cutting off meaningful dialogue with the very people who are attempting to help them.

As their responsibilities increase, INFPs are inevitably promoted into positions that take them away from the matters of the heart at which they had been so successful. INFPs should think twice about accepting a promotion that may offer ego gratification and a higher salary but move them beyond the activities at which they excel. To broaden their service base, INFPs must recognize when to quit, when to live with a product that is less than perfect, and when to recognize that others are not going to work according to their expectations.

INFPs' Careers

INFPs' career choices are highlighted by their values: integrity, hard work, idealism, sensitivity, and concern for other people. But they also bring self-criticism and perfectionism to the workplace, which can sometimes hamper their natural skills. Even if showered with praise, INFPs are never quite satisfied. Their high learning abilities allow them to excel academically in almost any field, so they need to select their careers based on other criteria, looking for a comfortable fit based on their type preferences and personality.

Careers that involve human service are the ultimate home of the INFP: psychology, teaching, health care, and church work, for example. INFPs' career choices must ultimately serve their own idealism. If not, they can become restless and stressed, and their work can become sloppy and counterproductive.

Summary

Whether it's at home, work, or play, INFPs are at their best when they are helping others and satisfying their own ideals. They are, in many ways, the ultimate idealists. In general, while they love to learn, grow, excel, and please others, they are always their own worst critics. They know their only true judge is themselves. They often remind themselves that they could have done better, and they may have a life-long struggle with perfectionism and self-esteem issues. In the end, INFPs almost always tend to sell themselves short.

Adapted from the writing and teaching of Otto Kroeger and Janet M. Thuesen.

INFPs On a Team

Naturally Bring to a Team

- A talent for facilitative listening and knowing what is behind what is said; their relationships are about helping people clarify issues, values, and identity
- Identify strongly with others, appearing to know just what the other person needs to function better
- Great people skills – listening, facilitating, motivating, recruiting, counseling
- Create unity and harmony within a team by listening with empathy

Teamwork Style

- People oriented, they participate by quietly championing worthwhile causes and encouraging individuals to achieve
- Supportive, caring, democratic, and participative, they foster growth and affirmation of individual members
- Have minimal focus on rules and procedures that are seen to inhibit freedom and autonomy

Potential Blind Spots

- May become so absorbed in a project that they can lose sight of what is taking place around them and appear to be unfocused
- Might concentrate on deeper issues and can lose a sense of perspective
- Can have difficulty with structure
- May become overzealous about a value and find it difficult to acknowledge another's point of view

To Help Them Succeed

- Provide a sense of integrity and opportunities for fostering wholeness, harmony, and mental health in others
- Give them the flexibility to capitalize on bursts of energy and not be berated for the lulls in between
- Let them work alone when they need to; interacting with a great number of people at once may drain their energy
- Help them find personal meaning in a project

Adapted from [Quick Guide to the 16 Personality Types in Organizations](#) by Sue A. Cooper, Roger R. Pearman, et al.

Managing the INFP

WORK LABEL – ADVOCATE

- A peacekeeper
- Undertakes a great deal
- Absorbed in projects
- Deeply caring
- Idea oriented

STRENGTHS

- Dedicated
- Conceptual
- Ingenious
- Idealistic
- Perfectionistic

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

- Communicate more with others
- Take care of important details, routine
- Try to see beyond own values
- Be more objective and realistic
- Develop and use a social network

TO FUNCTION BEST INFPs NEED: To handle significant projects from start to finish. Support for ideas, especially their own. Encouragement and respect for their unique contribution. Freedom from structure and rules.

INFPs ARE FRUSTRATED BY: Their own inner standards of perfection. Routine and inconsequential details. Conflict and unpleasantness. A lack of purpose.

INFPs IRRITATE OTHERS BY: Appearing reserved and detached. Refusing to deal with unpleasantness. Undertaking too much and being moralistic.

INFPs VALUE: Harmony, self-determination, and meaning.

ON A TEAM: They act as peacekeepers.