

## ESFP

*(About 8.5 % of the U.S. population)*

Of all the 16 types, ESFPs are the most in touch with the here-and-now. They *live in the present moment*, thrive on interacting with others, are entertaining, and enjoy the challenge of the unknown. Their Extraverted, action-oriented approach drives them to act first rather than carefully thinking things through ahead of time. “You only go around once in life” might be their motto, and they want to take full advantage of everything life has to offer.

### **ESFP Personality Highlights**

- Their **Extraversion** makes them outgoing, socially gregarious, and interactive.
- Their **Sensing** allows them to see the world realistically, tangibly, and in the present moment.
- Their **Feeling** encourages them to be warm and nurturing while making subjective decisions.
- Their **Perceiving** leads them to be flexible, spontaneous, and easygoing.

ESFPs easily handle a lot of detailed information in a personal way, constantly updating and adjusting to an ever-changing environment. They seldom have much interest in long-range planning, but prefer to operate as part of a team and are adept at helping others achieve their goals.

Here are some other characteristics. ESFPs...

- Focus on the immediate, giving them a low tolerance for procedures, routines, and anything else that stands in the way of immediate gratification.
- Are driven to make each moment a successful interpersonal experience.
- Constantly tend to accentuate the positive, denying and repressing anything that is uncomfortable, often employing diversionary tactics to avoid a conflict.
- Are very accepting of others and believe people should “live and let live.”
- May quickly start a conversation about something pleasant if an argument erupts.

### **ESFPs in Personal Life**

ESFPs have an uncanny skill for juggling many activities and people. For the most part, they enjoy hustle and bustle and the spotlight when it is on them. In the presence of an ESFP, you’ll often feel positive, enthused, and excited, although somewhat tired and out of breath from trying to keep pace and follow each new dynamic as it surfaces.

ESFPs are often misperceived. Their spontaneous nature (Perceiving) and their firm grounding in “what is” (Sensing) as opposed to “what can be” can make them appear to lack depth, direction, and purpose. But this is not the case. It’s just that their depth, direction, and purpose are always interpreted in light of the demands of the moment.

***ESFPs at Home***

ESFPs make family events exciting and entertaining, although they are usually “happenings” rather than carefully planned rituals. This lack of planning can cause family members of different types (particularly Judgers) to become highly stressed as the event approaches, although they may greatly enjoy the outcome. ESFPs can work wonders at the last minute, pulling together a successful party in mere minutes, often to the consternation of those watching on the sidelines.

In later life their hunger for the unknown and the unexpected does not end. This is best illustrated by a woman who, when her husband died, met with a minister the night before his funeral. When asked whether there was anything special she wanted included in the service, she thought briefly, looked up, and replied, “Surprise me!”

***ESFPs as Children***

ESFP children must often struggle to be understood. They see themselves as entertainers, dancers, garbage collectors, car washers, train engineers – their identities change daily. As a result, these children are often viewed as hyperactive, constantly needing to do things and to receive strokes and affirmation. The plus side is that they are very capable of entertaining themselves, though their activities may not necessarily meet with parental approval.

The need to be doing also applies to learning. When learning is fun, social, and a chance to entertain or be entertained, ESFPs excel. When it is more abstract and theoretical, they start to withdraw and ultimately will lose interest. While Sensing-Perceiving (SP) types tend not to do well in college (which requires a great deal of abstract and theoretical thinking) and often drop out before graduation, ESFPs may stick to it once they learn that college can be a four-year party at their parents’ expense. They may not excel academically, but they manage to perform well enough to stay in school, making the most of campus social life.

***ESFPs as Parents***

ESFP parents can pack into a single evening everything from Little League to dance class, a church meeting, and a home-cooked dinner. While this can be very exciting for everyone involved, it also can leave them feeling overextended and scattered. Ultimately, this can lead to guilt over all the things left undone. Even when they themselves are not overextended, ESFP parents can make their children feel that way, especially children of a different type. In fact, ESFPs can seem like competition to their children. They’d much prefer to be one of the kids and get involved in an activity than to sit on the sidelines as spectators with all the other parents.

**ESFPs in Professional Life**

ESFPs love a surprise and are a surprise. It takes little imagination to understand some of the challenges and opportunities this type encounters in relatively rigid workplaces. Effervescent and exciting, free-spirited and fun-loving, nifty and nonconforming, ESFPs bring a breath of fresh air to any situation. Unfortunately, their free spirit can also be a source of frustration to others. Like most Perceiving (P) types, for whom turning work into fun is an ongoing challenge, ESFPs are the

embodiment of fun. In fact, this fun dynamic is so much a part of their nature that when something unpleasant cannot be converted to fun or avoided completely, it is time to simply drop the subject and move on.

### ***ESFPs as Leaders***

ESFPs have a moderating perspective when deadlines become stressful. Other types may see them as irresponsible about deadlines and demands. But as pressures close in, it is the ESFP – like no other type – who can identify with frustrations and feelings of failure, who can say the right word or do the right thing to relieve tension, and who can keep impending doom at bay. Rarely do ESFPs sit around feeling sorry for what’s happened. They will face it, have an appropriate amount of guilt, and then move on. Auntie Mame’s “We need a little Christmas” in the middle of total financial ruin is a classic illustration of how ESFPs move themselves and others from life’s tragedies to triumphs.

ESFPs tend to be realistic in their outlook as leaders. They are masterful at building team support and encouraging others to perform. They are energetic and easy to be with, often lively and appreciative of others. Making a good impression is important to them, so they may go out of their way to accommodate the needs of others. They like to facilitate practical, concrete, action plans among harmonious and cooperative team members. They seek out tangible results while also being playful and having fun in their work. They are more interested in a comfortable and pleasant interaction in the present moment than in managing conflict and discord. Their strengths, when overplayed, become weaknesses in settings where long-term planning and analytical problem solving are considered essential leadership attributes.

### ***ESFPs as Employees***

The ESFP’s overall work style is marked with high energy and jovial interaction. There really is never a dull moment whenever an ESFP is present. They may not always be around when needed, they may not always be as timely as others might like, they may be overextended with too many irons in the fire, but they accomplish what needs to be done. This type is effective and pleasant to have around. They can be counted on to keep the office social calendar in shape along with the demands of their own job.

ESFPs have the ability to keep many projects moving at once. They motivate others when necessary, they freely pitch in and work alongside any level of the workforce, and they have time to listen to others’ personal needs – all while keeping overall goals and deadlines in perspective. They accomplish this in a very pleasant, flexible, and accepting atmosphere. Emergencies, however large or small, are viewed as welcome relief, not as intrusions. A busy day with a lot of variety (and maybe a few things left unfinished) is a great day and a motivation to get to work even earlier tomorrow. Breaks, whether spontaneous or scheduled, are an occasion to get caught up on office scuttlebutt. All of this combines to make the time pass quickly and productively. Working with or for an ESFP is rarely dull and usually a great deal of fun.

Another ESFP strength is their ability to let others be different and work at their own individual pace. Each of their four preferences helps them understand the present and how unique and significant each person is at that moment. So if someone needs structure, the ESFP can help that



## *PERSONALITY TYPE DESCRIPTION*

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person bring order

to chaos. They can affirm each person's efforts and are usually aware of how much may be going on behind the scenes, without necessarily becoming embroiled in it.

ESFPs are often viewed by others as spacey, dizzy, and disorganized, and may constantly bemoan the fact that no one takes them seriously. They must demonstrate that they are capable of completing assignments and following through on whatever project is at hand. While all Perceivers (Ps) can have problems with follow-through, for the ESFP it can make others (especially STJs) suspicious of their competence. But in general, ESFPs are able to rise through the ranks of an organization and are frequently well liked by their peers – assuming their quick wit and blunt remarks don't alienate others along the way.

### ***ESFPs' Workplace Stressors***

ESFPs have their down side, of course, and one of their weaknesses is overextension. While they may work miracles in keeping so many balls in the air, it is easy for them to over-commit and run themselves into the ground. Once this process starts, fatigue can give way to despair, distrust, doom, and gloom. Such behavior often grows out of their failure to pace themselves.

Another shortcoming of ESFPs is their disdain for routine and their disrespect for structure and order. Perceivers (Ps) generally, and especially ESFPs, have trouble recognizing that routines are a fact of life. By simply ignoring them in favor of whatever is happening at the moment, the ESFP can be an irritant at best, an obstruction at worst.

ESFPs often have difficulty grasping the long-term consequences of their actions. Because they are so grounded in the moment, they may not see the effect their decisions or actions may have on the big picture. As a result, the consequences of something as simple as a whimsical flirtation or an offhand remark may be far more serious than they could ever imagine. Something that was never intended can become a problem for everyone involved.

ESFPs, in their never-ending quest for fun, may not be welcome in a workplace that sees profit and productivity as serious business. Indeed, for many companies, "workplace fun" is an oxymoron; fun is what you're supposed to have at home or at the company's annual picnic. This organizational culture can be very stressful for ESFPs; they want everyone to understand that fun may be good for morale and productivity.

### ***ESFPs' Careers***

Career choices for ESFPs often include service to humanity, such as teaching (especially elementary school) or working in the arts or theater. They love athletics and anything else that offers relatively instant gratification. They gravitate toward careers that allow self-expression; show a concern for others; and offer opportunities to accomplish, improve, and grow. On the other hand, careers requiring adherence to rigid routine or other kinds of constraints will be very frustrating. ESFPs are challenged by things that are different, fun, and require some special effort to accomplish.

Such stumbling blocks aside, ESFPs are natural in the human services. They make excellent trainers, educators, religious leaders, sales people, athletes, and coaches. In these and other endeavors, coworkers appreciate how effectively ESFPs accomplish what they do and readily begin to rely upon them to bring a special dimension of play to work.

### **Summary**

ESFPs are usually warm, charming, and witty. They want to help others achieve and are often good at stimulating action in teammates. They want to do meaningful things and make a difference in the lives of other people. They thrive on interaction, entertaining, and presenting. The challenge of the unknown is attractive to ESFPs. Like other Sensing-Perceivers (SPs), they may be adept at handling emergencies.

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

## **ESFPs On a Team**

### **Naturally Bring to a Team**

- Warm and friendly, their relationships are about caring, sharing experiences, and having fun together
- Good at getting people to cooperate with them; they like helping people get what they want and need
- Easy to get along with; they can be counted on to get people to work together
- Provide a keen sense of reality, so are able to spot trouble early
- At their best when responding to a crisis, they are tactical and maneuver quickly
- Are genuinely caring, generous, and willing to help

### **Teamwork Style**

- Easygoing, yet pragmatic and expedient
- Will do whatever is necessary to get the job done with the least possible effort
- Tend to get a process going and summarize decisions as they occur
- Get others enthused and energized around a project

### **Potential Blind Spots**

- May misread others' intentions and personalize events
- Tend to be uninterested in abstractions unless they are relevant
- May ignore interpersonal problems to avoid negativity
- Might not implement an approach suggested by someone else

### **To Help Them Succeed**

- Allow them autonomy and freedom from routine and hierarchy
- Don't tell them they can't do something
- Present potential roadblocks and problems as challenges
- Provide choices, opportunities, flexibility, and a chance to work with people

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

## **Managing the ESFP**

### WORK LABEL – PERFORMER

- Hands-on operator
- Able to “stop and smell the roses”
- Natural negotiator
- Life of the party, lots of fun
- Exciting company

#### STRENGTHS

- Easygoing
- Accepting
- Situational
- Flexible
- Realistic

#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

- Study and develop the mind
- Set priorities and follow through
- Be open to the big picture
- Take time to listen to own values
- Deal with conflict and anxiety

**TO FUNCTION BEST ESFPs NEED:** Challenge, excitement, and the opportunity to be a hero or star. Respect for their skills, talents, and approach to the problems and needs of the organization. Positive feedback and recognition.

**ESFPs ARE FRUSTRATED BY:** Restrictions. Being told how to work. Anything slow. Not being allowed to operate and contribute to the project, group, or task. Injustice or cruelty.

**ESFPs IRRITATE OTHERS BY:** Not sticking to priorities and structure. Preparing too quickly and eliminating important details. Shooting from the hip (and getting away with it).

**ESFPs VALUE:** Action, excitement, and emotion.

**ON A TEAM:** They keep ‘em laughing.