

## **ESFJ**

*(About 12.3% of the U.S. population)*

The Extraverted-Sensing-Feeling-Judger type has four preferences that equip them to be gracious and effective in dealing with others. They can be considered the *hosts and hostesses* of the world. They use subjective decisions to bring harmony and goodwill to almost any situation, while at the same time gently and firmly imposing order and structure. They are exceptionally in tune with specific individual needs and especially sensitive to the nuances that make for happy, wholesome lives.

### **ESFJ Personality Highlights**

- Their **Extraversion** makes for lively interaction with the outside world and a zest for life.
- Their **Sensing** allows them to see the world around them as tactile and immediate. They are practical and grounded.
- Their **Feeling** encourages them to be warm and nurturing while making subjective decisions.
- Their **Judging** provides closure, structure, and accountability by producing finished products or events in a timely, orderly fashion.

Here are some other characteristics. ESFJs...

- Are given to quick, abrasive comments whenever their routines are interrupted.
- Compensate for their abrasiveness with extra sweetness.
- Have many “shoulds” and “should nots” and express them freely.
- May overlook facts when they find a situation disagreeable or a criticism hurtful; they may sweep problems under the rug rather than seek solutions.

### **ESFJs in Personal Life**

In their primary relationships ESFJs are very loyal, almost to a fault. They often sacrifice their own needs in favor of their partner's. This tendency to sacrifice, combined with their drive for harmony, often puts their personal welfare low on the list of priorities. It can result in their feeling more like hired help than lovers or mates. There is a paradox in this: while it is difficult for them to acknowledge their own needs, they may silently resent those who take them for granted.

### ***ESFJs at Home***

Home is the center of the ESFJ's universe. It is the focus of family life, the place for entertainment, the bastion against the harshness of the outside world, and the ultimate womb for all family members. The ESFJ's home is generally neat and orderly, although full of activity. It isn't advisable to tell an ESFJ to relax as long as there are unmade beds or messy kitchens. Relaxation for the ESFJ comes both from doing such chores and from knowing that they are done. As Extraverted-Judgers

(EJs), they may complain about the mess and the amount of work to be done, but they are truly happiest in serving others this way. Like all “Js,” they prefer to schedule their relaxation, whether it is reading a book or being with friends.

As a rule, home can be a place of fun, happiness, and affirmation for the ESFJ. These things must take place on schedule, however, and in an “appropriate” manner. For example, parties are great but only when sufficiently planned; spontaneous fun is a contradiction in terms. Appropriateness extends to dress, decorum, and behavior. They readily impose behavioral “shoulds” on other family members, and may become hurt or upset when others don’t meet their expectations.

In their later years ESFJs may mellow somewhat, but they still are guided by the same values. After being devoted to meeting the needs of those around them, they may turn their attention to more abstract, universal concerns. Even in retirement, however, they tend to be driven by “shoulds” and perhaps a few “should nots” – although these may be of a more leisurely kind and less service-oriented. For example, they might learn a new language, tend to neglected hobbies, or meet some self-directed needs. In general, home, children, and grandchildren will play a central role. ESFJs prefer to have family nearby and accessible, and may also enjoy the occasional unexpected visitor. For them, the ultimate symbol of security is a continually replenished woodpile for the fireplace the family gathers around.

### ***ESFJs as Children***

ESFJ children bring the same graciousness, caring, and punctuality to their young lives. They tend to be neat and easy to be around. At school they like teachers who stick to a lesson plan and generally follow the rules. They respond well in such situations with good work habits and punctually completed assignments. In one study, ESFJs were rated by teachers and school psychologists as the ideal type to have in the classroom. Many of the qualities desired by teachers come naturally to them; they are helpful, cooperative, and eager to please.

They are like that at home, too. But difficulties may arise with ESFJs if some of the demands placed on them conflict with strong inner needs. Bedtime, for example, can be difficult for the gregarious Extraverted (E) child, whose social needs may conflict with the time of night and parents’ demands. Still, these children think parents should be parents. They appreciate and respect rules and regulations imposed by those in authority. Role clarity is important.

### ***ESFJs as Parents***

This need for appropriate behavior also drives the ESFJ’s parenting style. The child of an ESFJ parent probably feels loved and generally satisfied, although somewhat restricted by the “shoulds” and “oughts” that are coupled with the constant need to put work before play. ESFJs are generally very patient with children, although even this can be subject to other demands and responsibilities. ESFJ parents are likely to be looked upon as being somewhat strict, but still very loving and caring.

### **ESFJs in Professional Life**

ESFJs are socially gregarious (Extraverted), which is manifested especially in the attention they give to both organizational and personal details (Sensing). All of this happens in an interpersonal style that praises and affirms others (Feeling) against a backdrop of structure, schedule, and order (Judging).

#### ***ESFJs as Leaders***

*Graciousness* describes the general lifestyle of the ESFJ, and it also sums up their management style. From separating workers in conflict to overseeing the annual company holiday party, ESFJs bring an appropriate graciousness to whatever is demanded. This quality is both an asset and a liability. It is an asset when ESFJs motivate and encourage employees to accomplish goals. They will take care that the work setting is pleasant, although it may be somewhat formal. However, graciousness can become a liability when they allow others to take advantage of them.

ESFJ managers will remember names and birthdays and do little, thoughtful things throughout the workday. If you work for an ESFJ, you will probably be quite sure of what is appreciated and what tasks have been performed well. However, you will also know when a mistake has been made. Their judgment, even impatience, will be apparent even if no words have been spoken. ESFJ managers keep score as a normal part of the work. Rewards will be given for good work; critical glances and guilt trips can accompany misplaced work assignments and energy.

ESFJs have many strengths and, as leaders, can serve as excellent role models. They are punctual, neat, responsible, and highly productive, with a great concern for others. In no time they can become important carriers of institutional memory. They generally achieve a favorable balance between the people being managed (process) and the tasks to be accomplished (product). This combination makes them friendly motivators. They know when to push the work force, when to hold the line and be firm, and when to back off and socialize. A sense of duty, loyalty, and ethical commitment to the organization are embedded deeply in the ESFJ's management style. They live and work that way, and they expect others to do the same. Such commitment can, at times, make them seem like slaves to the organization. But they would see no problem with that description and would wonder why everyone isn't similarly inclined.

#### ***ESFJs as Employees***

As employees, ESFJs are practical, personable, and focused on helping and supporting their teammates and managers. But as they pay attention to and care for the needs of others, they may set aside their own tasks to assist their teammates. When this happens, ESFJs run the risk of failing to accomplish their own assignments. This can lead to guilt and self-criticism. They are concerned about harmony and will always consider how decisions affect those with whom they work because they truly care about their teammates.

#### ***ESFJs' Workplace Stressors***

All of these qualities, while certainly admirable, can set ESFJs up for some serious problems. For example, their good nature seems to be constantly tested by others and, when pushed to the limit,

they are more likely to acquiesce than to hold firm. Also, when it is pushed to the limit, their sense of appropriateness can make them appear rigid and closed to new ideas. When backed into a corner, ESFJs may try to induce guilt and shame as a way of making colleagues or subordinates respond in what they believe is an appropriate manner.

Perhaps even more serious is the ESFJ's tendency to avoid conflict, which is very stressful for them. They would rather deny that something is wrong than confront it. When a disagreement occurs, it is particularly easy for ESFJs to sweep it under the rug. If you raise your voice in a hearty argument or a simple disagreement, an ESFJ may interpret this as extremely hostile and ultimately destructive to relationships and productivity. What may seem to be a harmless yet necessary process – basic, day-to-day discussions that move the organization toward its goals – can result in ESFJs losing control and leave them feeling powerless.

ESFJs need to realize that conflict and disagreement are a part of daily life. They must learn that they will be respected far more for sticking to their guns than for caving in to other points of view in the name of harmony. They need to remind themselves constantly that conflict and disharmony can ultimately lead a group to increased creativity and productivity. Most of all, they must continually remind themselves that disharmony is generally not a reflection on them and that seeing it through to a solution is better for everyone involved.

Given their own sense of responsibility and nurturing tendencies, ESFJs can become stressed when others do not live up to what they define as appropriate and responsible. For someone in authority to tell them not to worry about such things only adds to the ESFJ's tension; "not worrying" becomes another thing to worry about. Instead, they need to talk things through with others. They especially need support, encouragement, and social connections during stressful situations, even though they may deny the need for that support or feel unworthy of it. Hard work, even busywork, is better than sitting around alone imagining the worst. Diverting their energy into some meaningful activity with measurable results and positive social reinforcement is probably their most effective stress-reducing technique.

### ***ESFJs' Careers***

ESFJs' careers often lean toward those that serve humanity in some way: medicine, public school teaching, the ministry, and psychology. Sales and other public service-oriented jobs also have particular appeal. More impersonal tasks (e.g., related to computers or bookkeeping) and jobs that demand theory and speculation (e.g., college teaching, consulting, or investment brokering) can be particularly stressful to this type. Other careers in which ESFJs excel include the social services (e.g., public health and social welfare agencies) and school administration.

All of these areas allow ESFJs to maximize their natural talents to be gregarious, interpersonally skilled, organized, and focused on others' needs. They, more than other types, often find themselves in careers that result from emulating childhood role models. This means they can work successfully in many other fields for which they would not normally seem appropriate, including accounting, law, and engineering.

### **Summary**

The ESFJ's focus is on providing for and supporting others. They are genuinely concerned about people and use their ability to interact with others to nurture established organizations. They strive to create and sustain harmonious working relationships, but they may have difficulty handling situations when conflict occurs. ESFJs may take on too much of other people's priorities and ignore their own needs.

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

## **ESFJs On a Team**

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

- Supportive of others; their relationships are about a genuine concern for the welfare of team members
- Organize, prepare, and remember important events
- Focus on harmony; they are often seen as a facilitator/caretaker on a team
- Provide logistics, especially in service to others or to an organization

### **Teamwork Style**

- Organized; good at providing a sense of security and independence to others
- Expect others to follow rules and procedures
- Intent on knowing others' needs and providing for them
- Foster positive relationships using cooperation, enthusiasm, and consensus building
- Softly authoritarian and decisive; give information to prompt rather than direct others' actions

### **Potential Blind Spots**

- May avoid or smooth over conflict, even when issues need to be addressed
- May be overly sensitive to feedback and criticism
- Are sometimes overloaded in an attempt to respond to the needs of others

### **To Help Them Succeed**

- Comfort them with routine and a secure, stable work environment
- Supply appreciation and meaningful support for who they are and what they do
- Give advance notice of change, with information about the background and rationale for the change

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

## Managing the ESFJ

### WORK LABEL – PROVIDER

- Warm-hearted
- Active committee member
- Sociable
- Strong value systems
- Always doing something nice for someone

#### STRENGTHS

- Warm
- Cooperative
- Involved
- Caring
- Harmonious

#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

- Give people a second chance
- Take care of own needs
- Be open to the big picture
- Keep an open mind and listen
- See values as less absolute

TO FUNCTION BEST  
ESFJs NEED: Harmony, encouragement, praise, and emotional support.  
A structured work environment with many opportunities to work with people.

ESFJs ARE FRUSTRATED BY: Criticism and a lack of appreciation for people's needs. Complex theories and abstract thought. Impersonal decisions. The challenging and breaking of established rules.

ESFJs IRRITATE OTHERS BY: Becoming impatient and refusing to listen or see new and better ways. Subjectivity and lack of logic in interpersonal situations. Being too focused on social acceptability.

ESFJs VALUE: Tradition, human beings, and stable relationships.

ON A TEAM: They bring human comforts to light.