

Pip tips

The interviewer is not your friend or helper - Don't be horrible to the interviewer because they are not responsible for the system, and they are just doing their job. Remember that they are not allowed to influence your answers, so they are very limited in helping you understand the question and helping you understand what sort of answer they want.

Don't expect the interviewer to be smiley and friendly. It is their job to look completely neutral. So if they seem to be unfriendly and unsympathetic, don't let it worry you.

If you are nervous or uncertain about the interview take a friend/helper - It's not a nice process to go through, so nerves might cloud your judgement and cause you confusion on the day. If you think that might happen, take a friend/helper, preferably somebody who knows your daily activities very well, and understands how you cope, how long things take, what help you need and what difficulties you have to overcome. They will probably be less nervous and thinking more clearly during the interview.

Stupid questions - There will be lots of them. Don't take it personally. Answer each one as if it's a brand-new question unconnected with anything you said previously. Answer comprehensively, including repeating what you've already said.

The interviewer is simply putting information into the computer. He/she is aware that somebody else in the Benefits office may look at individual answers later when making your assessment, and they will not have heard or read something you said five minutes before that answer.

Thresholds - The system works by having criteria within each section. You either meet that criterion or you don't, and there are no extra prizes for exceeding it by a long way. For example, if you need your clothing specially adapted for you, then you have met the criteria of needing help with clothing. It doesn't matter whether that help comes from a friend spending 10 minutes altering clothing item, or you have to spend £100 having things made from scratch. Just keep explaining what your need is until they tell you to stop.

Do not underestimate the extra help you need, or the extra time and effort you have to put in to doing everyday tasks - Most of us do our utmost to cope independently, and we are rightly proud of that. We don't like it when other people assume that we cannot cope by ourselves, and we tend to underestimate how much extra time, extra effort and extra discomfort/pain we put ourselves through.

However, on a PIP assessment it's more important to be realistic than it is to be proud!

For example, I know it takes me longer than it takes my wife to peel a vegetable, but I've rarely thought about how much longer. If someone asked I would probably say "a bit longer", but in preparing for this assessment I realised that it probably takes five times longer. Swallow your pride for the interview and be totally realistic, because "a bit longer" would not pass the threshold, whereas 5 times longer does pass it.

Prepare yourself - Read the paperwork carefully and speak to Emily or one of the other members of the Trust team. It's likely that you will meet the PIP criteria on some factors (e.g. mobility, food, clothing, bathing), but you might not meet it on other criteria (e.g. remembering things, talking to people etc).

Before you go to the interview make sure you are very clear on which criteria are relevant to you, and why they are relevant. For example that you need help in dressing, help in the bathroom, help preparing food etc. Make sure you have some specific examples, like "I need someone to wash my hair", or "it takes me five times longer to peel and chop vegetables", and so on.