

2

Find out the reason for the sanction? Unfortunately it is not always clear why a person is sanctioned. If in doubt ask your Job Centre Plus Adviser or Work Programme adviser what the reason is.

3

Record what happened? Try to remember as much as you can of the circumstances leading up to the sanction. How does this differ from what the Job Centre says? What evidence can you provide to support your case? Set out as clear a description as possible of what happened e.g. dates, times, who you spoke to etc. Don't assume that the Job Centre knows all the facts.

4

Cope with related issues If you can show that you will suffer hardship if sanctioned you can claim a reduced rate benefit in certain circumstances. Housing Benefit and Local Council Tax Support might be linked to your benefit payment and could be stopped. You should contact Stockton Borough Council Benefits Team on 01642 393829 to check. It will help if you can obtain proof (e.g. a bank statement) to show that your benefit has stopped.

5

Challenge the decision! If you disagree with the decision or feel not all the evidence was taken into account, you should challenge the decision. Over 50% of cases are overturned so there is a good chance you will succeed! If you are sanctioned again another sanction may be for longer period if you accept this sanction. So even if you are only sanctioned for a short period you should still appeal.

In the first stage of the challenge, write to the Job Centre and ask them to look at the decision again. This is called a Mandatory Reconsideration. If this is not successful you can appeal to an independent tribunal. You can download an appeal form www.gov.uk. Search `SSCS1`

If you need further information on sanctions visit www.stocktonadvice.org.uk

and look under BENEFITS then point 3. How to deal with Benefit Problems

If you would like to talk to someone about sanctions or any other benefit problem, click on `FIND LOCAL AGENCIES WHO CAN HELP YOU` whilst in the BENEFIT section. This will give you a list of organisations who may help. Alternatively, there is a list of helplines under the HELPFUL TOOLS section.



BENEFIT SANCTIONS



WHAT ARE THEY?

HOW TO AVOID THEM

HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM



HOW TO AVOID BEING SANCTIONED

In order to receive some benefits, you have to agree to abide by some rules. If these rules are broken without good reason, then your benefit could stop. This is called a `sanction`.

When you claim **Job Seekers Allowance**, you will be seen by a Job Centre Plus coach or adviser who will draft a `job seekers agreement` or `claimant commitment`. This agreement is signed by you and is what you must do in order to continue to receive payment of benefit. It is therefore important that you only agree to what you can do.

If you claim **Employment and Support Allowance** you can only be sanctioned if you are placed in the work-related activity group and you are required to go to work focused interviews or do work-related activity. You may have to attend appointments with your Work Programme adviser. You cannot be sanctioned if you are in the Support Group. If you feel what you have been asked to do is making your health worse, get advice about getting into the Support Group.

1 **If you have any health conditions or disabilities don't assume that your Job Centre adviser has any knowledge about them** Instead, give full details in writing of the effect your health has on your everyday activities and your ability to move towards employment. Be as confident as you can be in negotiating the job seekers agreement – take a friend or relative for support if possible.



When I signed on after being made redundant, I didn't tell my adviser about my arthritis. My money got stopped when I didn't apply for a factory job which I knew I wouldn't be able to do....

2 **Tell your adviser or coach about any other issues that might impact on your ability to work or look for work** such as ongoing legal proceedings, domestic abuse, drug/alcohol issues, housing issues or child care

I'm a lone parent and didn't tell my adviser I could only work school hours. I didn't apply for a job that I could do because of the hours and got sanctioned.



3

If you think you are given an unreasonable instruction tell your adviser, if necessary use the complaints procedure immediately. If your circumstances change and you are finding it difficult to stick to the claimant commitment, contact the Job Centre and ask for a review straight away.

4

DON'T BE LATE!!! Try to get to every appointment early.

People can be sanctioned for being late. If you know that you are not going to be able to keep an appointment and there is a good reason (childcare or medical emergency, job interview etc.) let the Jobcentre and / or your Work Programme provider know immediately—see 5



I couldn't make my appointment as my mum had had a heart attack so I phoned the Job Centre. I was told not to worry about it but I was still sanctioned. I didn't get the name of the person I spoke to.

5

When you phone Job Centre Plus always make a note of the following-

- **The telephone number you rang**
- **The name of the person you spoke to**
- **The name of the contact centre you spoke to**— when you telephone Job Centre Plus, you can be put through to any contact centre in the country
- **The date and time of the phone call**

After the phone call, write or email confirming what was agreed and ask for an immediate response. Always keep a copy of all correspondence including emails and text messages.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR BENEFIT PAYMENTS STOP

1

Have you been sanctioned? Check that your money has not stopped for some other reason than for a sanction. It may have stopped because you didn't send a form back or attend a medical. Check letters you have received or ring Job Centre Plus.