

# Handling difficult questions in Job Interviews

Here is a list of subject areas and questions that may be considered inappropriate in an interview scenario. Some of these questions are not necessarily considered illegal, but may show prejudice. To be best prepared, go through these questions and plan your response.

## Questions related to citizenship, national origin, race, or ancestry

- Can you provide us with a copy of your birth certificate?
- Are you a Canadian citizen?
- Where were your parents born?
- What is your native tongue?
- Are you Chinese or Japanese?
- What race are you?
- What colour is your hair?
- Is your last name Indian?
- How long have you been in this country?
- Do you speak English at home?
- Are you considered to be part of a minority group?

## Questions related to age, gender, sexual preference, marital status, or family decisions

- What is your birthday?
- How old are you?
- When did you graduate from high school?
- What is your maiden name?
- Is your husband employed?
- Are you divorced?
- Is that Ms. or Mrs.?
- Who do you live with?
- Are you gay?
- Are you male or female?
- How is your family's health?
- Does your family approve of your travel?

## Questions related to religion

- Are you Catholic?
- What religious holidays do you observe?
- What is your religious denomination?
- Do you have any religious affiliations?
- What church do you belong to?
- What is the name of your rabbi?

## Questions related to physical/mental disabilities, handicaps, body type, health, or medical history

- Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations?
- Do you have any pre-existing health conditions?
- What was the date of your last physical exam?
- Do you have any disabilities?
- How can you work in a wheelchair?
- Do you have any use of your legs at all?

- When did you lose your eyesight?
- Do you need an accommodation to perform the job?
- How tall are you?
- How much do you weigh?

### Questions related to pregnancy, birth control, and childcare

- Are you planning on having children?
- How many kids do you have?
- What are the ages of your children?
- When do you plan to have a family?
- Do you have arrangements for your children while you are at work?
- Do you have after school care?
- How's your family's health?

### Questions related to a criminal record

- When was the last time you were arrested?
- Have you ever been arrested?

It is first of all, important to understand that most inappropriate questions are truly asked in ignorance. Many untrained interviewers are genuinely trying to be friendly. The focus of an interview is to determine if you are the right candidate for the job, therefore it is unlikely that the interviewer is intending malice.

Before making a rash decision on how you want to handle the situation, step back and take a good look at your options. It is important to not only know your rights, but to be able to respond to the question with dignity. You, as the interviewee, can respond in one of the following ways:

1. **You can answer the question.** Before you answer, examine the question for its intent and respond with a brief answer as it might apply to the job and move on to a new topic. If you cannot see the intent behind the question, then ask how the question relates to your ability to fill the position. If you choose to answer an inappropriate question, remember that you may be giving information that isn't related to the job and you may even give the "wrong" answer, which could harm your chances of getting the job.
2. **You can refuse to answer the question.** Make sure to explain why you won't answer the question. Unfortunately, depending on how you word your refusal, you may come across as a difficult or challenging employee.
3. **You can ignore the question altogether.** Make sure to redirect the discussion toward a new topic. The interviewer may even recognize their blunder and appreciate your willingness to put it aside and go on.
4. **You can terminate the interview and walk out.** If the question is blatant discrimination and truly offensive to you, your best option is to end the interview and move on to an employer that will be more respectful of their potential employees.

**As the candidate being interviewed, you have the right to respond to inappropriate interview questions in the best manner possible. Make sure that you take a good look at all your options and respond to a sticky situation with an approach that will make you come out the winner!**