

# Discriminatory Questions

Job interviews include some difficult questions about your qualifications, and on occasion, your personal background. To handle difficult and uncomfortable questions tactfully, preparation is essential.

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## What are they?

Discriminatory questions typically deal with a personal history. They can range on a variety of topics:

- Nationality
- Religion
- Age
- Marital and Family Status
- Gender
- Health and Physical Abilities

Most employers avoid questions on these subjects but every now and then you may run into a situation where an interviewer will ask you a question of a personal nature you are uncomfortable answering.

There are a few reasons an interviewer might ask you "illegal" questions about your background and personal life including medical background, nationality, physical appearance, disability, and family. It might be intentional, either directly related to the functions of the job or to determine your reaction in stressful situations that relate to the position.

Although questions of a very personal nature are typically inappropriate, they are not criminal. These questions in an interview process become criminal if they determine a hiring decision and are not directly related to qualifications of the job functions. For example, if you will be dealing with international clients, an interviewer might ask if you are fluent in certain languages. Otherwise, asking your fluency in other languages might be a means of determining ethnic background. Another example includes questions of US citizenship. If you are interviewing for the US government, contracting agent, or high-level security clearance position, a question of your citizenship is appropriate.



Even experienced interviewers fall into the trap of inquiring about your personal background to have a more casual interview. Either way, it is important to be prepared and unflustered by such questions.

## How to Deal with a Discriminatory Questions

There are a variety of options in responding to illegal questions. Here are just a few:

### ***Decline***

This approach should only be used if you find the question offensive. Since this is a very straightforward approach, it should be handled with tact. Point out that it is not an appropriate job interview question and you do not feel that it will interfere with your job performance or relevant to the specific requirements of the job. Avoid using the word "illegal" in your answer, it might cause an already tense situation to become more uncomfortable. Use this approach with discretion.

### ***Answer Directly***

It is not illegal to answer an illegal interview question. However, if you choose to answer it, be concise and clear and make sure that you feel completely comfortable in disclosing this personal information.

### ***Tactful Sidestep***

This technique tends to be the most tactful approach. If you think the question is an honest mistake and desire the position, turn the illegal question into a legal response. This will allow the interviewer to realize that the question asked is inappropriate. Here are some sample answers to illegal interview topics:

- Questions about your personal life, family, etc: "I prefer to keep my personal and professional life separate."
- Concerning Children, personal responsibilities, etc: "My personal responsibilities still allow me to put in overtime and weekend work."
- Country of origin or if US citizen: "I am legally able and authorized to work in the United States."

Answering these interview questions with tact and discernment show your preparation. It might not land you the job, but if you choose to prepare, you will show the interviewer that you can handle yourself with dignity and professionalism in uncomfortable situations.

If you feel that you have been discriminated against, please file a complaint with the Federal Equal Opportunity Commission which enforces federal anti-discrimination laws

