

# UNETHICAL QUESTIONS

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## *Tactful Answers to* **UNETHICAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Should a potential employer ask a question that you think is inappropriate or illegal, what should you do? Discriminatory questions are hard to define in many cases, and proving discrimination (whether it be at the conscious or unconscious level) is very difficult. Here are a few areas that are “out of bounds”:

<i>religion</i>	<i>political affiliation</i>
<i>ancestry</i>	<i>birthplace</i>
<i>age</i>	<i>national origin</i>
<i>number of dependents</i>	<i>marital status</i>
<i>credit rating</i>	<i>age of children</i>
<i>spouse's occupation</i>	<i>language you speak at home</i>
<i>sexual orientation</i>	<i>...etc.</i>

A good general rule: If the question does not relate to your ability to do the job, be careful! But what should I actually do when I'm in the interview?

***When you're confronted with an improper question, you have three choices:***

1. You can refuse to answer and tell the employer you think the question is improper. You may feel better but you'll probably be back on the street continuing your job search.
2. You can swallow your pride (and your privacy) and answer the question. You may not feel that great, but you'll still be in the running.
3. You can answer the legitimate concern that may lie behind the improper question while ignoring the exact question.

For example:

***Q: Do you plan to have any children?***

A: I plan to pursue a career whether or not I decide to raise a family. Or, I have that taken care of and I don't anticipate any absences from work.

**Possible Underlying Concern:** The employer has a genuine question about how long a potential employee may remain on the job or if extended periods of leave may be required.

***Q: Are you aware that we generally hire a more athletic type of person for this job because of the high level of stress and travel involved?***

A: I can handle all tasks in this job description.

**Possible Underlying Concern:** The employer wants you to understand the physical demands of the job and that the job description may not be complete.

***So how should I prepare myself?***

It's important for you to decide, before interviewing; just how sensitive you are to some prohibited topics. You must decide now how you intend to handle these topics and whether or not you will answer questions that may be illegal or inappropriate. The interview is not the place to decide. The following tips may help you to prepare:

- Make a list of sensitive questions you may be asked.
- Determine ahead of time which of the three approaches discussed about you will use for each question.
- Rehearse different ways of answering so that your reply will come out smoothly and naturally.
- Practice, practice, practice! The more interviewing situations you experience (including real or “mock” interviews), the better you'll get and the more comfortable you'll become.

Despite all attempts to limit illegal and unethical questions and discriminatory behavior, you may still encounter an interviewer who will ask improper questions. Remember, it is a matter of degree: some improper questions are intentional, some are not; some interviewers know what they are doing, others may not. You have the right to say, “That's an illegal question and I refuse to answer” and by doing so you may win the battle (but you'll probably lose the job). Consider the above strategies; prepare yourself to answer sensitive questions; give answers that get to the underlying concern: then the interviews should go smoothly.