

Handling Illegal Questions

If you are asked an illegal question it is important not only to know your rights but also to be able to respond to the question with dignity and assertiveness. You can respond in four ways to an illegal question at the job interview:

1. You can answer the question
2. You can refuse to answer the question, which is well within your rights
3. You can examine the question for its intent and respond with an answer as it might apply to the job
4. If you cannot see the intent behind the question, then ask "*Can you please tell me how this is related to my ability to fill the position?*" Most (if not all) interviewers will reword the question as it relates to the position.

Below are some suggestions on how to respond to these illegal questions, directly:

Do you have a disability? What is it?

Redirect the question to talk about your abilities or strengths, rather than any disability. You could mention your experience, fitness, flexibility, current knowledge, maturity, stability, lack of childcare commitments, common sense, reputation and business client contacts.

If this leads to an objection that you are over-qualified, or that you may expect a higher salary or pension, mention (if it is true) that, at this point in your career, work satisfaction is a higher value for you than a higher profile, higher paying position and this is what you want to be doing.

Are you married?

If you are married and you have children, you can assure the employer that you have reliable childcare with backup for emergencies, that you do not take company time to make private calls, and that you pride yourself on punctuality.

If you are married and you don't have any children at home, assure the employer that regardless of your family situation, you are and always will be fully committed to excellent performance at your job.

If you are not married, assure the employer of your reliability and some community involvement (because you never know where the prejudice is: will they judge you for not having children? Will they worry that you might be planning to have children?). Regardless of your family situation, emphasize that you are free to do overtime and travel for the company, if that is true for you.

How long have you been in Canada? Where are you from?

Whether you chose to answer the question or not, relate your answer to current Canadian markets, trends and knowledge and to the employer's immediate needs. Mention your transferable skills with confidence. Relate your ability to learn quickly and the way you have adapted to life here. You could speak about the reputation of the institution where you were educated, and parallels between your own training and methods and those here. Refer to challenges you have faced in your country that are similar to those encountered here.