

# Handling Illegal Interview Questions

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By Michael R. Neece CEO, Interview Mastery

Interviewers who ask illegal questions should not be interviewing because they are increasing the legal risk to their company. Even though they're asking an illegal question, it's not effective for you to say, "That's an illegal question." Responding professionally is more effective than telling the interviewer they're breaking the law. There are federal, state, and even local laws governing job interviews. United States employment laws make it unlawful to discriminate based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age (40+), sexual preference, health or disability. Questions that don't focus on job qualifications are probably illegal.

This article will help you respond to illegal interview questions. This article is does not constitute legal advise. For current information on employment law go to U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) web site. [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov).

Every question provides you with an opportunity to present information about your abilities. Even illegal questions are an opportunity. Your response strategy for handling illegal questions is:

- First, do not directly answer the illegal question. Remain calm and be positive.
- Second, deal with the concern behind the question. If you're not sure what the real concern is, ask the interviewer to elaborate why this information is important to them. Or you might ask "What are the realities of this position that prompt you to ask me that question?" Or "How is that important to the position?"
- Third, express your commitment to your career and to perform the position at the highest levels.

The following example demonstrates how you can use this response strategy to handle most of illegal interview questions.

*The interviewer asks:* "How does your family feel about the demands of this job and your career?"

*Your Response:* "I'm fully committed to performing my job at the highest level and delivering the results required. My career is very important to me and I have a strong support system. Could you rephrase or elaborate on your question. I want to make sure I address your concern."

In this example, I did not show any negative emotions and did not say that the question was illegal. I responded to what I believed was the real concern behind the question and then asked the interviewer to rephrase their question to ensure I understood and addressed their concern.

The response strategy outlined here will help you deal with most of the illegal questions you'll encounter during an interview.