

Interviewing with a Disability

Disclosure

A common concern is the issue of whether or not to disclose one's disability, and if so, how? This is a highly personal decision, and should be made on a case by case basis. However you decide to handle the issue, it will help you to have a plan in advance and be prepared.

Generally, employers want workers who they can rely on and who have the skills, background, and abilities to get the job done. When and if you discuss your disability to a potential employer, you will want to emphasize your abilities and describe how you'll get the job done, especially if you will use methods and tools unfamiliar to the employer.

It's possible that the employer has no experience or knowledge of your disability and may have inaccurate notions of what you can and cannot do. You may benefit from bringing up the issue first and putting the employer at ease. Making a positive statement about your disability may dispel any doubts or misconceptions the employer may have. Here is one example of how a candidate addressed the issue of his disability during an interview:

"As I am sure you've noticed, I am blind. I often meet people who have never met someone with a visual impairment and wonder how I am able to do everyday things and work. Since I am unable to drive, I get around using public transportation and the taxi system, which, incidentally, comes directly to this office. I use a cane when I walk around and can get around on my own once I have a quick tour of a new place. The position description states that this job requires advanced knowledge of the Microsoft Office Suite. I previously worked as an administrative assistant in a busy office for two years where I regularly produced PowerPoint presentations, Word documents Excel spreadsheets, handled the phones and emails. I use a screen reading software that reads the necessary information off the screen to me and allows me to access everything by keyboard. I have headphones I wear so I don't disturb co-workers but keep the volume low so I can still talk with others and answer the phone."

Know Your Rights

For a brief overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act and employment issues, view the [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's \(EEOC\) fact sheet](#). The EEOC also has a sample list of the difference between legal and illegal questions that an employer can ask you.

If you feel that you have been discriminated against in your employment, please contact your AW2 Advocate as well as your local [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) representative.

Handling Inappropriate Questions

In general, there are three ways to deal with inappropriate questions

- **You can answer the question.** Sounds simple and you get the situation out of the way. However, only do so if you are comfortable answering the question, and be aware that the information you provide might come back to haunt you.
- **You can refuse to answer the question.** You inform the interviewer that that question is potentially illegal and not relevant to the job description. However, being too direct might put you at odds with the interviewer, so don't resort to this unless the questions are truly offensive.
- **You don't answer the question** and instead address the intent or concern behind the question. This way you attend to the interviewer's worries without forfeiting your rights. Emphasize your skills and experience, and direct the conversation back to how qualified you are for the job. An example would be if they ask you "Do you have a disability that requires you to go to the doctor often?" Realize that the interviewer is worried about your attendance, so reassure them that you are just as responsible as the next person and can provide a list of references that will vouch for your high attendance records. Again, you don't necessarily state your disability, but rather address their concern and mention positive characteristics, such as responsibility, organizational skills, etc.

Useful Job Interview Resources and Links

Job Applicants and the Americans with Disability Act: <http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/jobapplicant.html>

US Department of Labor Career Onestop: <http://www.careeronestop.org>

Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP): <http://www.acap.army.mil>