

Job Interview Quiz



Can you ask applicants if they have kids during a job interview?

SITUATION

Jeanine Tonnick interviews for a bartending job at a local hotel. Bartenders must be at least 21 year and Jeanine looks like a teenager. So during the interview, the manager asks Jeanine her age. She replies truthfully, that she's 25. That resolved, the manager turns to his next concern: whether Jeanine has the flexibility to work a varying schedule. Do you have any young children at home, he asks? She tells him that she has a 1-year-old son and adds that she's a single mother. The manager ends the interview on the spot and doesn't offer her the position because he doesn't think a single mother can do the job.

QUESTION

Which, if any of the manager's actions was/were CLEARLY discriminatory?

- A. Asking Jeanine her age
- B. Asking Jeanine if she had young kids
- C. Flatly refusing to hire Jeanine because she had a kid
- D. All of the above

ANSWER

C. Although all of his actions raise red flags, flatly denying Jeanine a chance for the job because of her status as a single mom was the only one that CLEARLY crossed the line.

EXPLANATION

This is a tough one and don't feel too bad if you answered D. But while **all** of the manager's actions were questionable, a case can be made to defend his asking Jeanine about her age and family status. After all, an employer has a right to ask about age and family status if those concerns are relevant to the applicant's ability to handle the demands of the position. But while asking Jeanine about her age and kids are in the gray area, immediately disqualifying her for being a single mom is indefensible. What the manager should have done was follow up with Jeanine to determine if she could actually handle the hours. Had he done so, he may have learned something about her situation that

alleviated his concerns, e.g., that she lived with her parents and they had agreed to watch the child at night.

WHY WRONG ANSWERS ARE WRONG

A. is wrong because asking Jeanine for her age was not only appropriate but necessary given her youthful appearance and the need to confirm that she was old enough to be a bartender.

B. is wrong because a case could be made that having young children directly affected whether she had the scheduling flexibility the manager needed. But while it may be reasonable for the manager to worry about a single mother's ability to handle the hours and demands of the bartender's position, the manager never determined if *this particular single woman* could do so. He made assumptions about her suitability for the position *because* she was a single mother—and treating people based on such stereotypes is exactly what human rights laws are designed to prevent.