

# Recruitment and interview practice



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Resources from the Charlie Waller Trust to help when  
applying for a job

# Recruitment and interview practice

It's more than likely you'll be nervous in the build-up to a job interview, especially if you experience anxiety or have concerns about discussing your mental health. Take a look at our resources, full of useful advice and guidance, which will help keep those worries at bay!



## Preparing for interviews and managing nerves

Most people find interviews stressful. You may really want the job, but you're competing with others who want the same thing. You also don't know what to expect, and you may have previous experience of stressful interviews or assessments.

With such a lot at stake, it's normal to feel nervous. However, there is a lot you can do to stay positive and minimise your nerves.

## Understanding and managing stress

As an interview approaches, you might feel tense or shaky, sense your heart is beating fast, feel hot or cold or have a churning stomach. This is quite normal – your 'fight or flight' mechanism has probably been triggered. Understanding that this is a natural response will help you to manage these feelings better.

### Understanding stress

A lot of what goes on in our bodies is regulated by our autonomic nervous system. Most of the time, you won't be aware of it, but if it detects an increase in your stress, the system goes into overdrive. When activated, it sends more blood to your muscles, increases your heart rate and breathing and pumps out the adrenaline hormone. All this subsides when the 'crisis' is over.



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## Managing stress

To prevent those symptoms making your interview difficult, it's useful to learn some calming strategies that you can practise if you feel nervous. Mindfulness and meditation can help you feel calmer through focus and breathing. Familiarise yourself with these techniques and use them regularly to keep your stress levels down.

Stress is not all bad though. Having no nerves at all before an interview is probably just as unhelpful as having too many. Stress is motivating. It prompts you to prepare for the interview and engage with the process when you get there.

## Be prepared

Preparing thoroughly for an interview helps you to be less anxious.

### Preparing for online interviews

You may have at least part of your interview process online. This does have some positives – you don't need to worry about the stress and cost of travelling to your interview, and you'll be in an environment you're comfortable in. Plus, you can relax straight afterwards.

However, being online may make you feel more anxious. These tips will help you to prepare in advance to help manage your anxieties:

- Even if the interview is online, you can expect some small talk, and your interviewer should take a couple of minutes to put you at ease.
- If you're worried about technical difficulties, prepare in advance – ask which video calling service they'll be using and practise to make sure the video and sound are working on your device.
- If you can, practise using your phone hotspot with your laptop in case you have any internet problems on the day.
- Knowing that it's all working in advance will help you feel in control, and help prevent any technical hiccups during your interview.
- Try to establish a separate space for your interview which is away from where you usually sit. It can help to get changed into a planned outfit ahead of your interview, including smart shoes.
- Take 10 minutes ahead of the interview to sit quietly and prepare.

If things go wrong:

Despite all your best efforts and preparation, the tech involved in online interviews can sometimes be unreliable. Your interviewer may face the exact same problems.

Try to stay calm and redo your last action. If you're unable to fix the issue, explain what's happening to the interviewer. They will be able to guide you on what the best course is.

Remember, it's unlikely that something will go wrong and even if it does, this is not something you're being assessed on as part of your interview.



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### Preparing for your journey

If the interview is at a venue, check the route carefully. Leave plenty of time for bus or train connections, or to find a parking space. Better to arrive early than late. Knowing how long the journey takes and what the building looks like will reduce stress on the day, so check it out beforehand.

### Preparing presentations

Study the brief and address all of it. Keeping to time is part of the test, so rehearse it aloud, preferably to someone else. Practise making eye contact with your 'audience'.

Be clear about how the presentation is to be delivered. Do you have to email it in advance of the interview or turn up with it on the day? Either way, have a back-up copy with you.

### Preparing for questions

Think about questions you're likely to be asked and prepare answers. Some will be about you and your achievements; some will be about how suitable you are for the role and how well you will fit into the organisation.

Research the company you've applied to so you can speak knowledgeably about what they do. Most interviews end with an opportunity for you to ask questions. Think of some in advance to avoid drying up. Remember that an interview is a two-way process. You're there to find out whether the job is right for you.

### On the day

You're likely to be feeling especially nervous on the day, so give yourself plenty of time to get ready. Plan an outfit that makes you feel confident and avoid clothes that are restrictive or will make you feel hot. Practise walking confidently and smiling, even if you feel nervous.

Ahead of your interview get into the right mindset – simple things such as playing your favourite upbeat music or standing tall will really help. Use breathing and relaxation techniques to calm your nerves. Make sure you avoid negative self-talk or dwelling on things that have gone wrong in the past.



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### In the interview

When you arrive, smile and make eye contact when you greet people. If you're offered a glass of water, accept it in case you get a dry mouth or need a moment to think in the interview.

During the interview, think and breathe before you answer each question. If you don't hear properly or are confused by a question, ask the interviewer to clarify. If you go blank, breathe, regroup your thoughts and look as if this is a natural pause in your answer.

If you feel nervous, wriggle your toes inside your shoes to loosen the tension. Remember, nerves are normal and if the interviewers do notice yours, they will know that getting the job is important to you.

### How to talk about your mental health before an interview

People are often frightened about talking about their mental health to prospective employers. They worry that they will be judged because of it or that it will adversely affect their chances of getting the job.

The good news is that employers are increasingly aware that they need to make the recruitment process fair. They can put things in place to make it more manageable if you suffer from a mental health difficulty such as anxiety. Many organisations have trained staff dealing with recruitment for you to talk to ahead of the interview.

### How to have the conversation

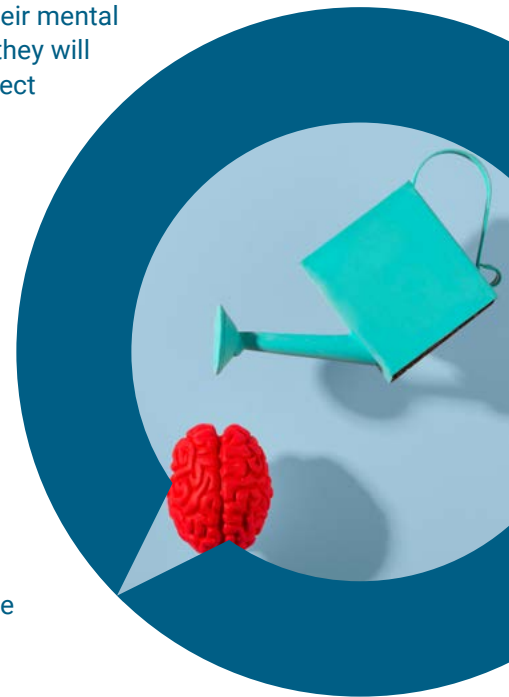
If you're worried your difficulties will make the interview process hard to go through, have an upfront conversation. The employer should then be able to put in place adjustments to help with this.

Find out who is managing the interview process and ask to talk to them, or email if that feels easier. If you're nervous about doing this, remember you're within your rights. Ask a friend to help you work out what to say.

Be prepared to explain your symptoms – not in detail but how they might affect your ability to do the interview. It might be helpful to have a clinical letter from your healthcare worker to support you.

Questions you could ask them:

- What will each stage of the process involve?
- How long will it last?
- What do I need to do to prepare for it?
- How will I be informed of the outcome of the interview and when?
- Will there be any specific feedback?



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## Your rights and what to expect

Remember that employers are not allowed to ask about your health during an interview until they have made a job offer. They can ask ahead of an interview, but only to establish what they need to do to make the process practical for your needs and if certain essential functions need to be carried out for a job.

If you are offered a job, in the longer term you may need adjustments at work, so it is worthwhile addressing them early. How the company approaches these issues will give you an idea of what their culture is like and whether you really want to work for them.

Mental health is protected under the Equality Act 2010. This means that if you have a condition which affects your ability to carry out everyday tasks and which is expected to last or has been present for 12 months, employers are expected to make reasonable workplace adjustments. These might include avoiding rush hour travel, allowing more flexible working conditions and allowing time off for appointments. The recruitment process is also included.



## Other Work Life Tools resources



Disclosure of mental health at work



Money and mental health



Managing your mental health



Career development and progression



What makes you tick?  
Finding your values and purpose



CV and cover letter writing

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