

How can I provide intersex informed advocacy?

- Educate yourself on intersex issues. Intersex online resources are listed on the back of this pamphlet.
- Stand up for intersex survivors when others are disrespecting their bodily autonomy.
- Understand that they are the experts on their own bodies and experiences. Do not refer to their traits as disorders, medical conditions, or birth defects unless they self identify with that terminology.
- Many intersex people view the non-consensual medical interventions as assault or sexual assault, though some don't. Just because consent was violated by a medical professional doesn't make it okay. Validate those feelings.
- Do not ask for information that is not relevant or needed, or ask invasive questions about their bodies.
- Do not make assumptions about gender identity or sexual orientation. Understand that being intersex is completely different from being transgender or queer, though some intersex people may also be transgender or queer.

For more information about intersex issues, check out these resources:

InterACT

<http://interactadvocates.org/>

The Intersex Roadshow

<http://intersexroadshow.blogspot.com/>

OII Australia

<https://oii.org.au/>

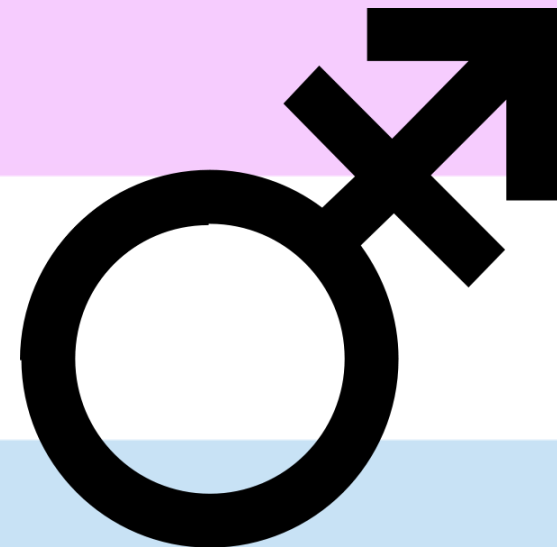
The Interface Project

<http://www.interfaceproject.org/>

This brochure was created by



3030 Merle Hay Rd.
Des Moines, IA 50310
Des Moines: (515) 850-8081
Iowa City: (319) 389-8430
www.thiowa.org
thiowa14@gmail.com



Advocating For Intersex Survivors of Sexual Violence

What is an intersex person?

An intersex person is someone whose genitalia, chromosomes, internal reproductive organs, secondary sex characteristics, or hormonal patterns do not easily fit the male or female sex category. According to Dr. Cary Costello, it is estimated that 1 out of every 150 people have intersex traits, and 1 out of every 2000 are born with ambiguous genitalia. There are over 30 known intersex varieties.

Why didn't I know this existed?

Intersex people are only assigned “male” or “female” at birth in the United States because our government and medical systems do not recognize that intersex people exist. You may also hear medical providers refer to intersex traits as “disorders of sex development,” though many intersex people strongly disagree that their natural sex traits are disorders.

How are intersex people treated?

Because intersex traits are seen as disorders by the medical community, even when no health complications are present, providers treat them by focusing on making the traits less visible through hormones and surgery. Medical providers often perform unnecessary cosmetic surgeries on the genitals of intersex children

to “normalize” their intersex traits. These surgeries cause painful scarring, reduced sexual sensitivity or numbness, torn genital tissue, removal of natural hormones, possible sterilization, and psychological trauma in many intersex people. In addition to the medical interventions, providers will often tell parents to keep the child’s traits a secret- even from the child. Parents have been lied to about their child’s body by medical professionals for fear they would react negatively. Providers have withheld medical records or abstained from writing anything about an intersex person’s surgery to prevent the patient from finding out that they are intersex, fearing the patient will react negatively. These non-consensual surgeries and medical interventions are considered torture and human rights violations by the United Nations, but they are still legal in the United States.

Intersex survivors may have difficulty accessing medical care after an assault...

- Due to traumatic experiences with medical providers. Many intersex children endure sexual assault at the hands of medical professionals.
- Due to lack of medical provider knowledge about intersex bodies.
- Due to medical providers having a lack of respect for the intersex person’s bodily autonomy.

After an assault, intersex survivors may also...

- Have difficulty relaying information on what areas were injured during an assault due to numbness or painful scarring, in genital regions or other areas of the body, from previous surgeries.
- Explaining the details of an assault to police or hospital staff due to the professionals’ lack of understanding about intersex bodies or issues.
- Have amplified feelings of shame not just from the assault, but from the assailant or sexual assault responders finding out that they are intersex. Many families teach intersex children to be ashamed of their bodies and keep their traits a secret, which can play a role in the aftermath of an assault.
- Face barriers in reporting the assault and going to trial due to fear of being exposed as intersex.
- Face intersex related discrimination while having to deal with the aftermath of the assault.