

WHAT IS INTERSEX ANYWAYS?

"Intersex" is a general catch-all term used for a variety of disorders of Sexual Development. Many think of 'hermaphrodite' whenever we speak of people who are intersexed.

Hermaphroditism is now called Ovotestes, and is a person with both ovaries and testes (both male and female gonads or sex glands). Intersex is a term that is practically used to describe a person whose reproductive or sexual anatomy doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. Some examples of this:

- A person appearing normally female, but having male-typical anatomy on the inside (or the reverse!)
- A boy may be born with a very small penis 'a micro-penis'
- Perhaps someone is born with a multitude of chromosomes, some cells are XX (female) and some are XY (male).

WHY DO WE NEED AWARENESS?

Many people have never heard the term intersex and don't know the amazing diversity within our bodies. We need to learn about our amazing diversity so that we can respect and end the ridicule, bullying, hatred and discrimination that so often happens to people that may be intersex.

If you have a child who is intersexed, we ask that you do not perform non-medically-necessary surgeries. A needed surgery is any life-threatening surgery, for instance a baby with an intersex condition may be born without a 'pee hole'. Having a surgery to open that up, in order for urine to escape the body is a necessary surgery, but cutting off 'excess tissue', or anything else not needed for life is NOT a necessary surgery. Many people who are intersexed have surgery at birth by doctors and well-meaning parents that change their anatomy to look more normal, but isn't needed for any other reason. Many of these same people later in life feel disfigured or mutilated. We encourage you to allow your child to decide to have cosmetic surgery as an adult, as it's best for the individual to decide. See the 'more resources' section for a great handbook for parents of children with intersex conditions.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How common is intersex?

According to the Intersex Society of North America (ISNA), one in 100 births on average differ from standard male or female.

Is a person who is intersexed a hermaphrodite?

Maybe, hermaphroditism is but one of many intersexed conditions, see 'the endless possibilities' to learn about others.

Is transgender or transsexual the same thing as being intersex?

No, a person who is transgender is about their inside feeling or brain chemistry (the exact science behind transgender status is still a mystery), where with intersex it's about sexual or reproductive anatomy.

How do you decide if they are a boy or a girl?

You don't need a surgeon! While "boy" and "girl" are mere labels, studies have shown that there is a good chance that a person with an intersex condition will grow up to feel either male or female, and not a 'third-gender'. For instance people with complete AIS generally grow up to feel female, and many children with cloacal exstrophy will grow up to feel male.

THE ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES.

The variations are numerous, almost too many to count, though many are more common. Here is a list of just a few of the more common conditions that fall under the term 'intersex':

- 5-alpha reductase deficiency
- Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS)
- Aphallia
- Clitoromegaly (large clitoris)
- Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH)
- gonadal dysgenesis (partial & complete)
- hypospadias
- micropenis
- mosaicism involving "sex" chromosomes
- MRKH (Mullerian agenesis; vaginal agenesis; congenital absence of vagina)
- ovotestes ("true hermaphroditism")

Truth be told, almost any variation is possible, except for having both a fully functional male and female reproductive system in one person (reproductively functional hermaphrodite) What wonderful diversity!

INTERSEX RESOURCES

Most of this pamphlet comes from the amazing work of the Intersex Society of North America (ISNA), you can visit them online at www.isna.org.

- Accord Alliance:
<http://www.accordalliance.org/>
- OII:
<http://www.intersexualite.org/>
- Inside Intersexuality:
<http://bit.ly/cEZtqt>
- Bodies like ours:
<http://www.bodieslikeours.org/forums/>
- Intersex Initiative:
<http://www.ipdx.org/>
- Intersex Awareness Day website: <http://www.intersex-awareness-day.org/>
- Handbook for parents from the Accord Alliance:
<http://bit.ly/dyvEB8>

Also visit your local LGBT group, they may have resources around people who have intersex conditions.

This pamphlet is brought to you by local Intersex Activists in Santa Cruz, CA, with lots of help from the ISNA: you can reach us by email: tara@birl.org. Suggestions, corrections and great dialogue are welcome.



INTERSEX AWARENESS DAY October 26th

INSIDE:

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- Why do we need awareness?
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