




How can I be an ally?

You can help by talking to your friends and family members about what intersex really is. The more people are aware about intersex issues, the less likely they will accept surgery and silence as the only option when they or someone they know have an intersex baby. If someone tells you about their intersex status, make sure to respect their name and gender identity as well as their privacy. Ask what they need from you and learn more about intersex issues so you can be as supportive as possible.

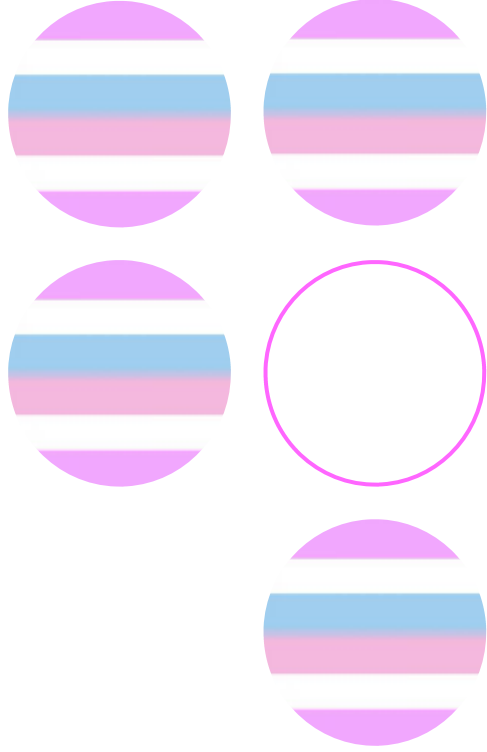

Information for this pamphlet was adapted from “Intersex FAQ.” Intersex Initiative. June 28, 2008. intersexinitiative.org/articles/intersex-faq.html.



GLBTIQ Student Resource Center



Student Center, Room 164
www.kennesaw.edu/stu_dev/glbtiq
Phone: 770-794-7926
E-mail: glbtiq@kennesaw.edu



What is the “I” in GLBTIQ?



What is intersex?

Intersex people are born with external genitalia, internal reproductive organs, and/or endocrine systems that are different from most other people. There is no single "intersex body"; the term encompasses a wide variety of conditions that do not have anything in common except that they are deemed "abnormal" by the medical community. What makes intersex people similar is their experiences of medicalization, not anatomy.

Generally speaking, intersex is not an identity category. While some intersex people do reclaim "intersex" as part of their identity, most regard it as a medical condition or just a unique physical state. Most intersex people identify and live as ordinary men and women, and may be straight or LGBTQ.

Technically, intersex is defined as "congenital anomaly of the reproductive and sexual system."

Intersex conditions are also known as "disorders of sex development" (DSD) in the medical community.

How common are intersex conditions? No one knows exactly how many children are born with intersex conditions because of the secrecy and deception surrounding it, and also because there are no concrete boundaries to the definition of "intersex." It is estimated that about one in 1,000 children, or five children per day in the United States, are born visibly intersex, which prompts early (and often misguided) intervention.

Are intersex people a "third gender"? Many people with intersex conditions identify solidly as a man or as a woman, like many non-intersex people. There are some who identify as an alternative gender, like some non-intersex people do. It is important to support everyone's right to define their own identities, and people with intersex conditions should not be expected to be gender-transgressive just because of their physical condition.

Is intersex part of the transgender community? While some people with intersex conditions also identify as transgender, intersex people as a group have a unique set of needs and priorities beyond those shared with trans people. Too often, these unique needs are made invisible or secondary when "intersex" becomes a subcategory of "transgender." For example, people who talk about intersex in the context of transgender often stress the risk of assigning a "wrong" gender as an argument against intersex genital surgeries. While this is a valid concern, it overlooks the fact that intersex medical treatment is painful and traumatic whether or not one's gender identity happens to match their assigned gender. It is for this reason that "intersex" is spelled out explicitly rather than have it "included" under the trans umbrella.

What are the correct pronouns for intersex people? Pronouns should not be based on the shape of one's genitalia, but on what the person prefers to be called. For children too young to communicate what their preferences are, go with the gender assignment parents and doctor agreed on based on their best prediction. Do not call an intersex person "it:" this is dehumanizing.

What is the difference between "hermaphrodite" and "intersex"? In biology, "hermaphrodite" means an organism that has both "male" and "female" sets of reproductive organs (like snails and earthworms). In humans, there are no actual "hermaphrodites" in this sense, although doctors have called people with intersex conditions "hermaphrodites" because intersex bodies do not neatly conform to what doctors define as typical male or female bodies. The word "hermaphrodite" is misleading, mythologizing, and stigmatizing. Although some intersex activists do reclaim and use this term to describe themselves, it is not an appropriate term to refer to intersex people in general. In short, snails are hermaphrodites; humans are not. Also, avoid using the word "intersexual" as a noun; instead use "intersex people" or "people with intersex conditions/experiences."