

**"Intersex"** is an umbrella term for people who are born with some combination of sex characteristics such as chromosomes, genitals, internal reproductive organs, or hormone levels that do not fit within the typical binary notion of male or female sex.



"I wish my teacher knew that intersex and trans are different, even though someone can be both."

~interACT Youth Member

## Facts

- Intersex people are not that rare! Nearly 2% of the population is born intersex -- that's about as common as people born with red hair or green eyes!
- Intersex traits aren't always "visible" -- you can't tell that someone is intersex just by looking at them.
- Intersex is a variation of physical sex traits, not a gender identity or a sexual orientation. Intersex people exist across all orientation and gender categories!
- Intersex children are often subjected to surgeries and other unnecessary medical interventions to make their bodies fit into binary boxes without their consent.
- Being intersex is different than being transgender: transgender refers to someone whose gender is different from their birth assignment, while intersex refers to someone born with sex characteristics that are outside of binary male or female sex.
- Transgender people often struggle to access gender-affirming medical care they do want, while intersex people are often coerced into unnecessary medical intervention they don't want.

**"I don't want other intersex kids to feel erased."**  
- interACT Youth Member

**interACT Youth**  
is a program of interACT that gives intersex youth in their teens and twenties opportunities for sharing experiences and developing leadership and advocacy skills.

Educators play an important role in young people's lives and have the ability to ensure that students feel respected, heard, and seen for who they are. Making them feel safe, understood, and included can go a long way towards building self-esteem and lifelong happiness. This brochure is the 4th in a series created by members of interACT Youth and informed by their personal experiences.

**InterACT**  
Advocates for Intersex Youth

More information and resources are available at [interACTadvocates.org](http://interACTadvocates.org)

"My body is not shameful, and I will no longer hide who I am."

~interACT Youth Member

**What We Wish Our Teachers Knew**

"My teacher said they didn't know how to teach about intersex."



"Don't talk over me, or act like you know more about my body than I do."

~interACT Youth Member



## In All Classrooms

- Teach your students that sex is different from gender! Neither are binary and both exist on a limitless spectrum! Sex traits don't have to be gendered. For example, some women have more body hair, and some men have higher voices.
- Educate students about sex and gender diversity at both the scientific and cultural levels to make intersex kids feel more comfortable in the classroom.
- Don't tokenize or place unfair pressure on intersex students, or expect them to teach others about intersex issues. Unless they volunteer, it is ultimately your responsibility to educate the class.
- Adopt inclusive and non-gendered language that makes intersex people like me feel more comfortable and respected. Not all bodies are the same!
- Avoid harmful language:
  - Don't use terms like "normal" girl or boy.
  - Avoid outdated terms like "intersexuality" or "hermaphrodite."

***"My biology teacher was supportive, but used the outdated and offensive word 'hermaphrodite' instead of the term intersex. She later apologized and fixed her materials -- I really appreciated that!"***

- Avoid generalizing or universalizing language:
  - For example, don't say all boys have XY chromosomes. Instead, say most boys have XY chromosomes.
  - Avoid referring to someone as "genetically male" or "genetically female" simply based on their chromosomes. Sex is determined by much more than just chromosomes!

***"A friend told me not to go into the girl's locker room anymore after I told them I'm intersex."***  
~ interACT Youth Member

## In School Health Centers

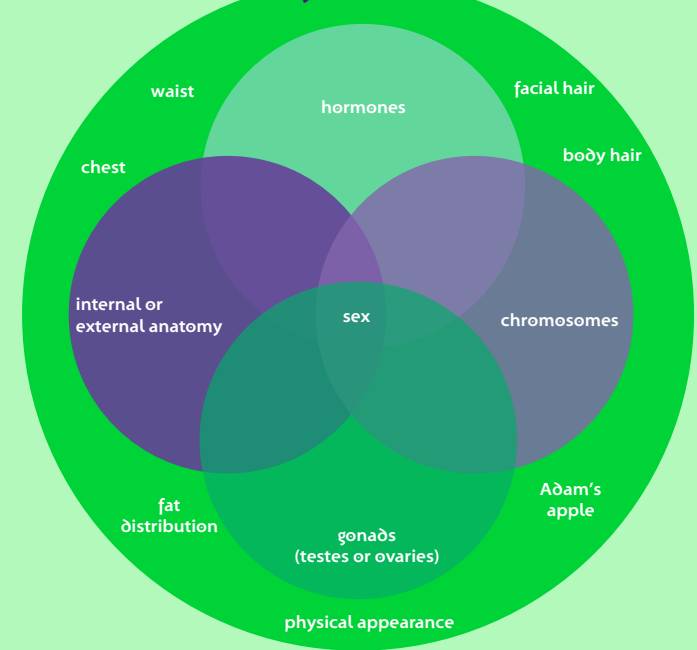
- Avoid gender-specific language around puberty and body development. For example:
  - Instead of "feminine hygiene products" say "menstrual products" or "period products." Some intersex (and transgender) people have periods! Not everyone feels comfortable with words like "female/feminine," "male/masculine."
  - Instead of terms like "becoming a woman" or "becoming a man," simply call changes what they are, e.g. "growing more hair," or "breast development."

- Learn to avoid making assumptions based on what a person's visible sex characteristics might be. For example, instead of assuming someone "feminine"-looking gets periods, ask them.
- Ask appropriate questions, and only when they are necessary.
- Puberty isn't always going to be linear or even the same for everyone! This can be particularly true for intersex students.

***"I walked out of health class crying last year."***  
~ interACT Youth Member

- Never assume a universal experience applies to all intersex people.

## Secondary Sex Characteristics



## In Sex Education Classes

- Not all bodies are the same! Intersex people often struggle with feeling worthy of love because we are often taught about relationships and intimacy in settings that exclude us.
- Don't act surprised or in awe over an intersex student's differences.
- Avoid making the student into a teachable moment without their permission. Never assume they are willing to answer personal questions.
- Sex-Ed is often the first place where we learn about reproductive health and about the human body. Excluding intersex from these conversations risks making intersex kids feel excluded, abnormal, or invisible.

***"My sex-ed class did not prepare me for the kind of puberty that I was going through. Part of this was because we were told what puberty was like in binary terms, and also because we were never taught about intersex bodies."***  
~ interACT Youth Member

## Actions

- Bring in outside resources and intersex speakers to inform yourself and your colleagues.
- Use what you've learned to educate your peers! Other educators and administrators are just as responsible as you are to be well-informed and aware!
- If an intersex student does want to educate their peers, listen to their ideas and create a space for them to share their knowledge. If intersex education is accurate, your students will feel comfortable learning and achieving.
- If you facilitate a GSA (Gay Straight Alliance) or similar club in your school, make sure that intersex students are invited, included, and respected in that space and that students who participate have access to intersex resources.
- Create a space that is open to people of all identities without judgement or scrutiny!
- Ask intersex students how they want to be treated and what terms they prefer for themselves. Then follow through!
- Directly support and advocate for intersex students outside of your school!