

WHAT'S HOT RIGHT NOW



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9 Ways Intersex Youth Want You to Support Them

March 18, 2015 by [Kel Kray](#)



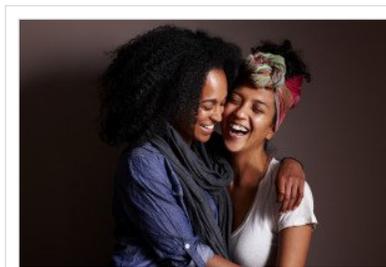
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"...patients can be helped to live a 'normal' life only if their intersexuality is concealed."

—American Academy of Pediatrics, 1996, via [Intersex Society of North America](#)

"For most of my life, I haven't felt in control of my body. But what I can control is how people perceive this condition and my relationship with it. And I want to say that this is my body. And my story. Let me decide what's to be done with it."

—Inter/Act Youth, 17



Source: [LGBT Health Link](#)

Intersex conditions, or differences in sexual development (DSD), are typically non-life threatening, natural variations of internal and/or external sex anatomy among our bodies.

And they're not uncommon. Intersex conditions are likely [more common than cystic fibrosis](#) – and [possibly as common as green eyes](#).

So what's the big deal?

The big deal is that as a society, we're *hooked* on the idea of sex as a **binary** thing.

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What's the first thing said when a baby is born? "It's a _____!" As if infants' genital statuses are necessary information for us to continue cooing.

We've made some progress opening our minds: **50% of millennials** believe gender falls on a spectrum.

But what if we acknowledged that *bodies do, too?*

Turns out there's a rad group of youth doing just that.

Inter/Act is a youth-led advocacy group for young people with intersex conditions or DSD. And they're spearheading a change in the way youth relate to and take ownership of their bodies.

Working alongside them is a community of deeply insightful parents and adult allies, many involved with the **AIS/DSD Support Group** and/or **Advocates for Informed Choice (AIC)**.

When asked "*What is your dream, and how do we get there,*" visions abound of a world where intersex youth are free to determine the meaning of their bodies unbound by stereotypes, coercion, or cruelty.

The overarching theme of Inter/Act is one of profound possibility.

The nine points that follow are their insights on *how we can get there*.

1. Reconsider the Birds and the Bees Language

One of the most liberating moments in my **assigned female** body was in a Gender Studies class (duh). During one very powerful hour, over 200 of us sat in awe as we watched a slideshow of **hundreds of vulvas**.

The beautiful anatomical diversity washed me in a new self-love. *Who knew?* Middle school health class definitely didn't cover natural variation in labia. Either you looked like the 2-D diagram or something was wrong with you.

Now imagine middle school health class, except you're a boy with ovaries or a girl with XY chromosomes.

Teaching the spectrum of sexual and reproductive development is *key* to generating awareness of and support for intersex youth.

Before we drill them with stereotypes, youth are remarkably receptive to difference. Shown the true diversity of our bodies in early education, we probably wouldn't bat an eye. Each of our noses is different, our hair's sometimes many different colors, and our sex and reproductive organs are also unique! *No biggie!*

There's a very **toxic and hurtful misconception** that an intersex condition is something to be "fixed."

But nothing is broken by an intersex condition except for sex binary – which isn't super reliable to begin with.

2. Don't Hide Bodies from the Youth Who Live in Them

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“There’s no such thing as an inappropriate question for a kid. Everything is appropriate. And if you don’t know the answer, you need to help them find someone who does.”

—Allison, 21, Inter/Act Youth

Almost every intersex youth you’ll speak to can recall a time when they knew information was being withheld from them. At home, at school, in the doctor’s office – because “*you’re too young,*” “*it’ll scare you,*” “*it’s not appropriate.*”

Denying intersex youth information is a form of communication itself. It says that information is dangerous and that your body is something to be ashamed of.

Historically, parents were told **not to tell youth** they were intersex because it’d cause depression, anxiety, and possibly suicide. Because of the **concealment model** of care, many folks don’t **find out they’re intersex until adulthood** when a secondary medical concern raises the need for testing.

Over the years, hundreds of intersex youth and adults have spoken out against secrecy, sharing the **emotional and psychological devastation** that results from having your body known to others but not to you.

Transparency with intersex youth doesn’t mean a 4-year-old needs to have a complex understanding of **5-alpha-reductase-deficiency**.

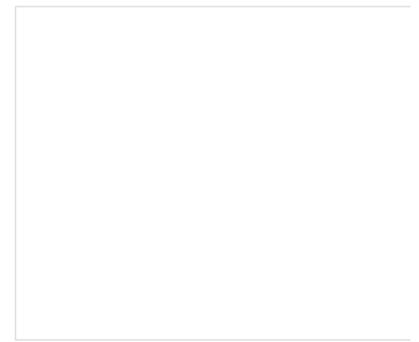
For example: “*Most girls have red juices, and most boys have blue juices, and you have extra blue juice*” enables youth to know about their body’s relationship to hormones in an age-appropriate way.

“*Parenthood isn’t like the yellow brick road: There are a lot of ways you can become a parent because people make families in all kinds of ways*” lets youth know that they might not grow a baby in their tummy, but their possibilities are still endless.

And as youth grow, we can naturally adapt the words we use to become more sophisticated.

So while an intersex youth might not (yet) be a genetics professor, they *live* in their bodies.

And we should be talking to them – *especially* when it’s about parts of their bodies that society is going to send them inaccurate or negative messages about.



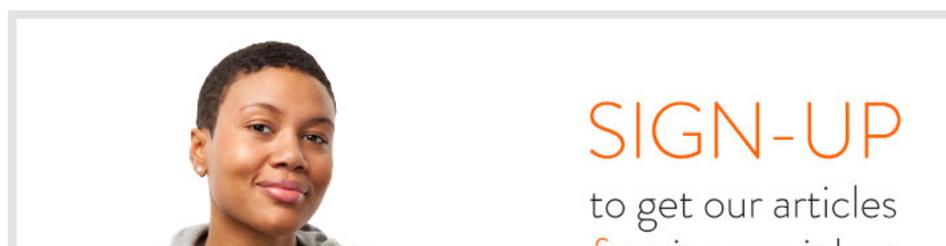
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