



You have intersex employees in your work force. Congratulations!

“Intersex” refers to people who are born with any of a range of biological sex characteristics that may not fit typical notions of male or female bodies. Most people think biological sex is either “male” or “female,” but experts estimate that as many as 1.7% of people are born with intersex traits – a larger number than the incidence of identical twins. Intersex people are not that uncommon — they just have been mostly invisible. But that is changing. There is more awareness now about the diversity of human bodies than ever before. People with intersex bodies, like anyone who may be seen as different, sometimes face discrimination, including in the workplace and in healthcare settings. But there are ways to ensure intersex members of your community and their families are well supported and able to participate fully in your community.

HOW TO SUPPORT INTERSEX EMPLOYEES

- 1. Ensure any equity and inclusion policies and activities are intersex-affirming.*** Discrimination on the basis of intersex status is by definition *sex discrimination* and intersex is an included category in the UN’s Free and Equal Global Business Standards. Reach out to intersex-led organizations like **interACT** for materials, guidance, and trainings to ensure your nondiscrimination policies and documents don’t ignore this important population. The 1.7 percent of your workforce that is intersex should be represented in your materials--to support your non-intersex employees in respecting intersex colleagues, to decrease company liability concerning potentially discriminatory behavior, and to ensure the intersex community (including your intersex employees) is seen and valued
- 2. Educate others! Inform future parents (including your own employees) that intersex medical interventions are usually unnecessary, and should not occur until an individual can participate in the decision.*** For many years, medicine viewed healthy intersex babies as needing to be “fixed.” The parents of as many as 1 in 2000 are still faced with unnecessary medical intervention at an early age – extensive, involuntary surgeries. *The vast majority of surgeries are not medically necessary and should be delayed until the individual can decide if surgery is wanted.* Some families report being told that surgery was necessary, only to find out later that this was not true. **These medical interventions often cause severe physical and psychological harm.**
- 3. Make sure your health insurance is not reimbursing for what has been deemed a form of torture by international human rights organizations like the UN.*** While doctors may act with the best intentions, rushing to “fix” an intersex child’s bodily difference most often does much more harm than good. Unfortunately, parents may feel pressured into making irreversible decisions about their children’s bodies before the child can choose what, if any, medical procedures they desire. Intersex genital surgeries are condemned by groups like the the American Association of Family Physicians, the World Health Organization, Human Rights Watch, and GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBT Equality. However, such procedures are not directly addressed by any law in the United States and unfortunately are still performed by a small group of specialists across the country.

A Few Helpful Tips

Don't make assumptions – let intersex people share their own stories.

Intersex people aren't a joke or a punchline. If you meet someone who is intersex, let them share the information they wish to share. Don't ask about their bodies or what procedures they've undergone. Respect their privacy.

Intersex is different from gender or sexual orientation. Like anyone, intersex people can have any orientation or identity.

Intersex people, like all people, may identify as male, female, non-binary, or any other gender—and they may express their gender in different ways. Similarly, intersex people may be straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, or identify in another way. Some (but not all) intersex people use pronouns other than “he” or “she,” like “they” and “them.” Always allow intersex people, just like anyone else, to identify what how they would like to be referred to and what pronouns they'd like you to use.

Being intersex is not the same as being LGBT, but there are similarities.

A person who is intersex was born with one or more variations in their sex characteristics; lesbian, gay, and bisexual refers to sexual orientation, and a transgender person has a different gender than they were assumed to be at birth. Intersex and transgender people may face similar barriers to accessing appropriate medical care and may experience similar discrimination based on their gender identity and expression. Both communities have a shared interest in autonomy and grapple with the loss of decision-making authority over their own bodies. *Just like LGB people have been subjected to harmful conversion therapy in an attempt to erase their healthy variations of sexuality, intersex people continue to be subjected to harmful surgical and other interventions that try to erase their physical differences. What's harmful isn't the difference itself but the social response to something perfectly healthy.*

The bias against differences drives the discrimination faced by the entire LGBTQI community. While intersex individuals are frequently forced to undergo unwanted and unnecessary surgeries during infancy and childhood, LGBTQ individuals are often denied affirming medical treatment in adolescence and beyond. Transgender people may also be required to undergo surgery they *don't* want in order to update the gender marker on their identity documents. **By better understanding the similarities and differences between these communities, we can be better allies to both!**

interACT: Advocates for Intersex Youth uses innovative legal strategies, media awareness raising, and youth empowerment programs to advocate for the human rights of children born with intersex traits.

By fighting for affirming care for intersex youth, we are helping to create a world in which all identities and bodies are celebrated.

FOR MORE INFO VISIT:

4INTERSEX.ORG
interactadvocates.org

