

Yes! I want to help ISNA build a world free of shame, secrecy, and unwanted genital surgeries now!

Here is my tax deductible gift of: \$35 \$50 \$100 Other \$ _____
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 Please mail to ISNA, 4500 9th Ave. NE, Suite 300, Seattle, WA, 98105

Top ten myths about intersex

- Myth #1:** Intersex is extremely rare.
Intersex is more common than Cystic Fibrosis or Down Syndrome, occurring in 1 in 1,500 births.
- Myth #2:** Only "true hermaphrodites" are really intersexed.
"Intersex" refers to anybody who was born with anatomy that someone decided isn't standard for male or female.
- Myth #3:** If you are intersexed, you must have a disease.
Some intersex conditions can cause health problems, but these do not necessarily require surgery in infancy.
- Myth #4:** ISNA advocates raising intersexed babies as a third gender.
ISNA believes in assigning the male or female gender, but without surgery and with the understanding that a child may transition later in life.
- Myth #5:** You can't raise an intersexed child as a boy or girl without surgery.
Of course you can! People do it all the time.
- Myth #6:** Surgery makes genitals that look "normal."
This simply isn't true in the vast majority of cases.
- Myth #7:** Once surgery is better, we won't have to worry about intersex.
Technical proficiency does not mitigate the ethical issues involved in altering kids to suit society's needs and expectations.
- Myth #8:** "Corrective" cosmetic surgery erases difference, shame, guilt, and fear.
"Normalizing" surgery gives parents this message: Your kid is a freak—we had to correct it, don't talk to anyone about it.
- Myth #9:** Dr. John Money is responsible for the troubles that have befallen intersexed people.
Money, now discredited, argued that you could make any kid a girl or a boy, as long as you made the genitals look "right." Too many surgeons continue to practice what he preached.
- Myth #10:** My contribution to ISNA can't possibly make a difference.
Remember what Margaret Mead said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world: Indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

www.isna.org
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undergo genital cosmetic surgery in the United States without their consent and with devastating consequences simply because their anatomy doesn't measure up

The Intersex Society of North America is working to change that.



Our mission

The Intersex Society of North America is devoted to systemic change to end shame, secrecy, and unwanted genital surgeries for people born with intersex conditions.

What is intersex?

“Intersex” refers to variations of genital and/or reproductive anatomy. Conditions labeled intersex occur in approximately 1 in 1,500 births. For the most part, intersex is not a disease—it is simply a bodily difference. Just as hair and skin color vary along a wide spectrum, so does sexual anatomy. However, some intersex conditions are associated with serious medical and endocrinological conditions requiring treatment.

Hiding intersex with surgery

Unfortunately, many people—including many doctors—have been taught that difference is unacceptable. So, since the 1950s, the approach to children with intersex conditions has been to “normalize” the children’s genitals, in the hopes of alleviating parental and social anxiety. Doctors make a quick gender assignment which is then reinforced with genital plastic surgery and hormones. Families are often not given the information or support they need because of the belief that surgery “cures” intersex and takes care of all trauma or sense of difference for the child and the family. The “patient” is too young to provide consent, and parents are not told about the risks to their child’s life, fertility, continence, and sensation.

Hiding intersex with secrecy

As risky as the surgeries are, even worse is the climate of secrecy that surrounds intersex. The traditional approach to treatment is based on concealment—concealment of the child’s “freakish” anatomy, and concealment of the fact that the child’s sex was ambiguous. Secrecy and surgery together send a damaging lifelong message to the person with an intersex condition: There was something so seriously wrong with you that not only did we have to fix it with surgery, but we also needed to keep it a secret from the world. The end result of this secrecy is profound—and unnecessary!—shame.

How is ISNA helping?

In the United States alone, five children each day are subject to “normalizing” surgeries. We believe it is unethical to put children’s mental, emotional, and physical health at risk simply because society is uncomfortable with their bodies. At ISNA, we believe in a patient-centered model of treatment for people with intersex conditions, and their families. We believe honesty is good medicine. Every child with an intersex condition should be assigned male or female at birth, without unnecessary surgery and with the understanding that the child may change their gender assignment when they’re older.

We work to end shame, secrecy, and unwanted surgeries through many strategies and programs:

Medical Education

We speak at medical conferences and schools all over the country to educate healthcare professionals about how to take better care of intersex children and their families. With our team of medical advisors, we have produced a clinical handbook and a documentary for use in classrooms. We are working to change the content of medical and therapeutic classes, textbooks, and in-service trainings dealing with intersex.

Public Education

We work with the media to get the word out about intersex. Our work has been featured in the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Redbook*, and on Discovery, Dateline, and many other television shows. We speak at universities, conferences, and public forums, and make educational materials available to the public. Our website is the most comprehensive source of intersex information anywhere.

Outreach and Advocacy

We engage in legal and legislative strategies for social change, and we network with a variety of communities and social movements to advance our mission and goals. Intersex issues are of concern to organizations focused on children’s rights, women’s health, disabilities, civil rights, human rights, LGBT issues, ethics, diversity, reproductive politics, and public health.

Help us create a world free of shame secrecy, and unwanted genital surgeries for people born with intersex conditions!

We need your help to continue expanding our education activities, reaching out to others about intersex, and pursuing strategies that will encourage health care professionals to be completely open and truthful with intersex people and their families. Please join us in making a difference in the lives of people with intersex conditions by sending in your gift today. ISNA is a registered 501c3 non-profit organization, and contributions to ISNA are tax-deductible.

Photos, clockwise from top left:
Lynnell Stephani Long, intersex
activist; Dr. Howard Devore, inter-
sex activist and psychotherapist;
Intersex presentation at Main
Library, San Francisco, 2001;
ISNA Founding Director Cheryl
Chase and Executive Director
Monica Casper.

