

GUIDE

For Intersex Adolescents





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Seta publication no. 29
 ISBN 978-952-9862-32-0, ISBN 978-952-9862-33-7 PDF
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 Printed by Trinket 2020





GUIDE

For Intersex Adolescents

We wanted you to be the main character of this guide because you know the most about yourself and your life. The starting point of this guide is that you know the things that affect you. All humans are different, which makes us unique. As the authors of this guide, we agreed to take your experience of the world and being intersex seriously.

As a result, this guide includes things that some intersex people have found interesting. We raise topics that have a perspective or information that has benefitted someone. We have also included questions. Some intersex people have found thinking about these questions meaningful and felt that finding an answer of their own has been important.

However, we decided to call this a guide because we think that people need guides. Travel guides, food guides and texts about experiences that may give a little hint of all the possible things you could do and think.

With love, Jaana and Juha



Intersex

Intersex refers to bodily diversity that we are born with. It means individual sex characteristics, such as chromosomes, genitalia, hormones or other gendered bodily characteristics that are not only male or female-typical. Gender, as we know, is constructed of many other things besides the body, too. At least our minds and communities affect it, and you know best what gender means to you and what words you like to use to describe it.

Intersex is a concept that covers a large variety of different diagnoses that can be seen as diversity in humans as described above. Being intersex is part of normal bodily variations. In this guide, we will never get tired of saying that we all are unique and special because we feel this is so important and the starting point of all good talk about humans.

People find out about being intersex at very different ages. Some may find it out very early on if they have had a diagnosis since birth. Others hear about it at a later stage in life. You may find out you're intersex in your youth if your period doesn't start or as a grown-up if having children

”An intersex body is valuable, lovely, natural, ordinary, beautiful, cool!”

– Intersukupuolisuus.fi -network

proves to be difficult. Depending on the definition of the concept, the number of intersex people in Finland varies. Different countries and different actors have different ways of defining all the things that intersex means, and there is a global

intent to create a common understanding of the concept. The share of people varies from 0.02–1.7%, depending on the estimates. What is key is that intersex people have always been around, everywhere in the world.

You can read more about being intersex in Finnish from the TIKKA project and intersukupuolisuus.fi websites and in English on the OII Europe website.



Identity – Who Am I?

Your identity is the answer to the question: "Who am I?" It tells you what you think about yourself. For instance, how you define your age, are you an adolescent or an adult. It tells you what values you find important and what are things you want to stand up for. Identity includes all your thoughts about yourself, all personal deals you have made with yourself. Your identity may include your nationality, your gender, your sexuality and your body. It can also have dimensions that we couldn't even think of. Your identity is

built around the words you use. You have built it yourself, both by yourself and in interaction with others. The construction of your identity is always affected by the time and place you are living in – part of our identity most likely leans on the expectations of the surrounding culture whereas other parts challenge them.

Who has affected the creation of your identity and how?

Identity changes. What you are now will probably not be accurate in ten years, and most likely, you think of



yourself differently now than you did ten years ago. This is a good thing because it means you have your entire life to explore who you are. You don't have to know anything for sure now, if ever. Finding your own identity requires the opportunity to think and ponder yourself and to make individual choices. Some research indicates that the better we understand our own identity, the better we feel and cope in social relationships.

How has your identity changed over the years? What are you thinking about right now?

It's great that identities are unique because it means that your sexual and gender identities are unique, too, which is good. Of course, this may pose challenges because it means you can't copy your identities from anyone else and probably can't find an answer on Wikipedia. Instead, Wikipedia says that genders include female, male, non-binary and agender.

If there were an article about your identity on Wikipedia, what would it say?



Own Boundaries And Emotions

You have to learn to know your own boundaries, no one else can give them to you. If you know your boundaries, it's easier to say yes and no when necessary, to make choices that are good for you. Boundaries are usually built in connection with your life experience, personality, values and identity. You have the right to feel respected, and one way of showing respect is honouring your boundaries. Boundaries are both in the body and the mind. With your boundaries, you can define different people's permissions for contact, touch and how they speak about you. With your boundaries, you can define the words and ways of being in contact with you and, on the other hand, your way of being in contact with other people.

Your boundaries are not necessarily permanent, like on maps. Humans are not mechanical and always the same, but spontaneous, emotional and changing. What is true today may not necessarily be true tomorrow. This means that we create and re-create our boundaries every day.

Which boundary is important for you to identify?

However, identifying your own boundaries may be difficult. Sometimes listening to your body

brings anxiety and pain. Possible traumatic experiences can affect people, their minds and bodies so that listening to your body makes you feel bad instead of good. This might be the reason why you don't want to think about your boundaries. Sometimes you feel like someone's sitting on your chest, your stomach feels hollow; agitation, paralysing, fear or a feeling of emptiness may cause us to react strongly to seemingly small things. In this kind of a situation, it's good to acknowledge that you are entitled to your feelings. But if your own feelings affect your behaviour so that they bother you or others too much, you should seek help for processing your emotions.

What question is important to you today? Can you find the answer yourself or do you need help with it?

If you need support, contact a safe and wise relative, school counsellor, psychologist, youth worker or some other person who understands gender diversity. It's good to remember that the law also protects your boundaries and those of others.



A Secret Or A Shared Story?

Your own boundaries include your own understanding of what you want to tell others and what not and what are the words you want to use. Many intersex people have thought about who to tell about being intersex and who not to tell. First, the most important thing is to acknowledge that you don't have to tell anyone. On the other hand, sometimes it might be good to tell someone – perhaps when visiting a doctor or when seeing a friend.

Even though you don't have to tell anyone, things can grow into secrets and being alone with a secret can be heavy. Being left alone may affect the construction of your identity. You can feel like you are wrong in so many ways, so you should think about this carefully – which leads to more bad things: telling someone or living with a secret?

Telling someone may lead to many different things. Some people can be unpleasant, unaware or even mean. On the other hand, many people can surprise us positively by being wise and understanding and prove that their words and spending time with them leads to many good things.

Sometimes we have a need to tell someone, and identifying this need is important. In this case, the most important questions to think about

are why we want to tell someone and what we hope will result from it. The answers lead us to the solution of the next question: who to tell? Should it be a good friend or perhaps a school counsellor? Who could best respond to your need?

At best, when we tell our stories, we learn more about ourselves than the person to whom we are telling the story. When we say things aloud, they become real in a new way for us. We also need each other in order to grow fully, in order to be good to ourselves. For that, we need the words of others and we need to be seen. It's important to be heard and seen as yourself.

We also need others, their words and looks, in order to grow fully. It's important to be heard and seen as yourself. A good option for this could be a peer group.

"How to have more space? For me, it's very significant that in some places, people use the word 'intersex'. That the word comes up somewhere. For instance, when talking about who is present, the word is mentioned. The word alone creates space, you get a feeling like 'wow, someone knows:'" – K

Bodily Diversity

Diversity is part of everyday life in nature, but it can be a little hard to understand for humans. Fortunately, the world is changing at a rapid pace, and more and more people understand that being a human means that we are all bodily unique in endlessly different ways.

For all parts, our bodies are different in size, weight and shape, as well as hairy and hairless in their own ways and have pigments of different tones. We all have unique genitals – contrary to the images that create the concept of ‘normal’ in our heads, we are all part of a story of great variation. Penises, vaginas, clitorises, testicles – if they exist or not – are all part of

“I think that maybe the utopia somewhere in the distant 2030 includes that there’s no pressure. That people are not mistreated, which means the pressure is gone. And that it would be really a norm that there are different kinds of people.” – K

“It’s a massive resource to find yourself and learn how to be present in your body. Finding being intersex has also enabled that.” – T

our uniqueness as humans. We develop in many ways and at different paces. Bodily diversity makes us human and sets us apart from machines. We cannot be copied and that is what makes humans so beautiful: uniqueness.

Bodily diversity brings with it diversity of senses, sexuality and expressions of sexuality. It’s important to find your own way of being close. Sexuality takes place in the body and the mind, alone and together with others. How it lives in you is part of your identity, and it’s allowed to be a living, changing thing.

It’s important to find the words you want to use to talk about your own body and think how you wish to communicate with others. To listen and be heard with these words.

How would you like to speak about your body and what are the words you want to use?



Take Care Of Yourself!

Sometimes life may feel hard so we gathered some things that might make you feel good.

HOW TO FEEL BETTER IN COMPLICATED SITUATIONS – Five Tips

- 1 Agree upon a code word with someone you know. When you send the code word to them as a message, they send you back a song, image, poem or something else that you two have agreed upon and that will make you feel better.**

Often, when we are alone our thoughts get stuck in a rut. This can break the rut, and it also means you're no longer alone.

- 2 Buy the hottest candy you can find and in a tight spot, "break the glass and enjoy".**

Sometimes, it's important to get your mind off your thoughts. Activating your senses will help.

- 3 Find a "comfort zone" from somewhere close to home that gives you comfort and a feeling of security. If you have a difficult day, go to your comfort zone. You can also plan in advance what snacks you will take with you.**

In times of trouble, we may need comfort. At times, just changing the scenery and aware self-compassion can make you feel a little better.

- 4 Collect a folder of beautiful photos on your phone.**

Aesthetics can heal wounds. When you have collected the photos yourself, the care of self-compassion is stored in them.

- 5 Write down your internal speech. How do you silently speak to yourself in your head? Think how you would react if you saw someone on the street talking to a child like that. What words would upset you and, on the other hand, what would you want the child on the street to hear?**

Our internal speech is hugely significant for how we experience and feel things. Negative internal speech is dangerous in the long run. It's worth it to practice how to speak gently and encouragingly to yourself.



WHAT ARE YOU LIKE

1. Write a list of ten things that are important to you. It can contain objects, values, people, animals...
2. After each thing, write two thoughts about what good this says about you.
3. Collect five of the most important of these thoughts and tell them to someone you care about and who cares about you. Then, ask them: "What do you think of the result and me?"

It's important to see that you have many good sides and also hear that others have seen them, too.

IF ONE OF THESE THINGS HAPPENS, SEEK HELP!

So far, we have written in a way that emphasises your right to self-determination but if one these things happen, we seriously encourage you to seek help.

1. You are not getting enough sleep
2. You experience feelings of anxiety or depression over and over again
3. You are cutting yourself or self-harming in other ways
4. You have suicidal thoughts

We all need help from others at times. Everyone encounters moments when surviving alone would be too much to ask. You don't have to and you shouldn't be alone.

This guide has been written so that it would be easier for you to identify and verbalise themes related to being intersex. We hope that this guide helps you to connect the things that make you feel like you are good, beautiful and capable of influencing your life to being intersex.

Seta is a human rights NGO. Seta aims for a society of equality and individual welfare that includes everyone regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or bodily characteristics.

