



Australian
Human Rights
Commission

Responsible Reporting Guidelines

People born with variations in sex characteristics

These guidelines are for journalists and editors to provide advice for responsible reporting on issues relating to intersex people and people born with variations in sex characteristics.

Approach

The terminology used to describe people born with variations in sex characteristics is contested.

The Commission strongly recommends language in any reporting be guided by individuals with lived experience and their peer support and advocacy organisations, such as:

- Intersex Human Rights Australia: <https://ihra.org.au/style/>
- Intersex Peer Support Australia: <https://isupport.org.au/>

Terminology

Always begin with asking someone about their preferred terms or descriptors, and avoid making assumptions about the terms a person may use.

Do use

Intersex

An umbrella term describing people born with biological characteristics such as reproductive or sex anatomy and/or a chromosome pattern that don't fit the typical definitions of male or female.

People born with variations in sex characteristics

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Other terms

Some individuals prefer to use diagnostic or chromosomal labels for their variations, sometimes together with a gender label, such as XXY; KS Man; XXY Woman; Complete Androgen Insensitivity; XY Woman; Swyer Syndrome; or Turner Syndrome.

Avoid using

Disorder or Differences of sex development (DSD):

This term was used historically by clinicians and is strongly contested by people with lived experience. They dispute that intersex is a 'disorder', but rather a healthy variation of human bodies.

Best practice interview guidelines

Do be guided by the person you are interviewing. Ask the intersex person if they are comfortable talking about their body and medical experience and respect their answer. Some intersex advocates are happy to share their experiences in an effort to educate and help bring change - but don't assume this is the case.

Don't focus on genitals or bodies. It is inappropriate to ask an intersex person questions about their bodies or genitals unless they have volunteered that information. Typically, those questions are only asked out of prurient curiosity.

They also distract the journalist and the reader/viewer from understanding the whole person and from focusing on larger issues that affect intersex people, like medically unnecessary surgeries and social stigma. Unless an intersex person volunteers this information, it is also inappropriate to ask for details of surgeries or medical procedures they may or may not have had.

Don't conflate or confuse Intersex issues with sexual orientation, gender identity or LGBT identity. Intersex is a form of bodily diversity, not a form of gender diversity such as being transgender. Like everyone else, intersex people have a diverse range of gender identities, but this is not what defines them as a population.

Intersex people may be in heterosexual relationships, in "LGB" (lesbian, gay or bisexual) relationships, or not in a relationship; others may be in queer relationships or ones that do not fit any current codification.

Imagery and vision

Images of orchids or the intersex flag are most appropriate to use in reporting. Images of real people may be used, but ensure they include representations of people from all different cultural backgrounds and ages. [The best place to source this is from Intersex Human Rights Australia website, which can be found here.](#)

Images of trans or gender non-conforming people, rainbows, Mardi Gras parades and other LGBTQIA+ symbols are not appropriate to use. This is to ensure images used to do confuse or conflate intersex people and issues with sexual orientation, gender identity or LGBT identity. If you are to use an image of a parade for example, make sure it is a specific Intersex event.

Never show images of genitals in reporting. This is inappropriate and invasive.

Do not use female or male icons, or a mix of these two icons together. For example, using the generic bathroom signs for male/female toilets would be inappropriate, as would a mash of up of female/male iconography that is meant to symbolise intersex people.

Further information

If you require further information or are unsure about best practice for your story, see Equality Australia's website: <https://equalityaustralia.org.au/>