

YOUR CHILD IS A TAONGA



A support guide for
whānau and family of
rangatahi with
variations of sex
characteristics (VSC)

ia Intersex
Aotearoa

www.intersexaotearoa.org

THE KAUPAPA for parents to remember

Congratulations! Your child's body is both natural and normal. As long as you are not responding to a life threatening medical situation, take the time to enjoy being with your unique and beautiful tamariki.

You are not alone. 2.3 % of the population has a VSC. You can ask for support from your community, whānau and friends. Sharing your situation with others may help challenge any feelings of secrecy and shame.

Remember, you get to decide how this is presented. Model this positively, and others will follow your lead! Consider joining an online parents support group to both learn and share.

Seek engagement and connect with intersex-led organisations and with adults with variations of sex characteristics. We are here and would love to connect.

Try to balance your child's right to privacy with countering the effects of shame. If you treat their variation with secrecy, consider that your child may feel like its something to be ashamed of.

FOR SUPPORTIVE WHĀNAU of intersex young people

Many parents fear they may have done something wrong to cause their child to be intersex. Variations in sex characteristics (VSC) are a naturally occurring phenomenon. VSC can be seen throughout all parts of nature. The way you react matters. You can help make this a positive discovery.

Do not feel pressured to rush any decisions. Encourage whānau to seek advice from others before committing to any surgical or hormonal interventions; whether that advice is from other medical professionals, psychologists, intersex individuals or intersex-led organisations.

Your child will need you to be their advocate, especially if they are too young to add their voice to these conversations. Consider this responsibility carefully, and if you can - wait. If they can communicate, listen to them. Share simple and body-positive messages with them, and use accessible language and terms. Most importantly, don't keep secrets from them.

THE CHALLENGES described by adults with a VSC

People with a VSC can lead happy and fulfilling lives with or without medical, surgical or hormonal interventions. The choice should be theirs to make, at the right time.

Learning from adults with a VSC can really help whānau understand the situation better. Over the past 30 years, there has been greater awareness of VSC's, what some of the best approaches are, and what the difficulties can be.

It can be challenging to be intersex; not because of how we are made, but how we are treated. One underlying issue can be the lack of general public awareness of VSC. And... you can help change that! Information sharing can lead to more informed parents and young people, resulting in better choices and harm-reduction. The pathologisation and invasive medical approaches places all the onus on rangatahi to change. Yet, it's not our bodies that need to change. It's wider society that deserves to be educated in order to understand and respect natural bodily diversity.

A HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH TO HEALTH

A human-rights approach to healthcare recognises that each person must lead their own health and wellbeing journey. This can mean a focus on de-medicalisation, or in this context, removing the perspective of a VSC being a 'disorder', into one of that centres the positives of health and difference.

Is there a medical emergency? Is the child/young person unwell? Are there any immediate health concerns? No? Then why is a hospital/healthcare setting deemed the appropriate and only place to discuss VSC?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has asked the NZ Government to educate and train medical/psychological professionals on intersex and the consequences of unnecessary medical interventions, and bring an end to unnecessary treatments.



BE PART OF THE CHANGE. RE WRITE THE SCRIPT!

We are calling on all people, whether they are parents, wider whānau or working in healthcare, to take responsibility for leading the change in public awareness of intersex/VSC.

ITANZ is working to build relationships with parents, support services, government officials and the medical community in order to build better networks of understanding and care in Aotearoa about VSC's.

This includes developing peer support services for young people, adults, parents, caregivers and whānau. Please, reach out for support, referral and advocacy. We are here to support you and your child's wellbeing.

Want to reach out? Talk things through? We would love to hear from you.

Contact us at:
info@intersexaotearoa.org or reach out via our website.