

Emotions can be complicated. Sometimes your body reacts before you have the words to describe what you're feeling. Other times, you might not feel anything at all, or you might feel so many things at once that it becomes overwhelming. Being removed from your home and placed in foster care can bring up a wide mix of emotions that don't always seem to fit together. You might feel angry at your family for the situation you're in while also missing them deeply. You might feel confused about what you're "supposed" to think or feel about being in foster care. You might tell yourself that you can handle everything on your own, yet still feel lonely, abandoned, or unsure where to turn.

When people—whether adults, peers, or society—tell you to “get over it,” “stop feeling that way,” or “just stay positive,” it can feel invalidating or even hurtful. Those messages often try to shut down emotions instead of making space for them. And when we hear these messages over and over, it's easy to start believing them. You might begin judging yourself for not being able to “move on,” or you might push your feelings away or shut down emotionally because that seems easier. But avoiding feelings doesn't make them disappear—just harder to understand.

For transgender and gender-diverse youth, there's often an extra layer of pressure. Cisheteronormative society is full of “shoulds” about gender and how people are expected to act. These messages can show up in big ways—like being told you don't “look” like your gender—and in smaller ways, like being told that “boys don't cry” or “girls shouldn't be angry.” Even within

For Youth: There's No Wrong Way to Feel

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LGBTQ+ communities, there can be unspoken rules or expectations about how you're “supposed” to know, express, or talk about your identity. Maybe you've heard that you should have understood your gender sooner, that you must choose a name or pronouns and never change them, or that you have to meet certain expectations to be “trans enough.” None of that is true.

Adding all these “shoulds” to the emotions you already have can make everything feel heavier. You end up feeling bad—and then feeling bad about feeling bad. Telling yourself that you “shouldn't” feel a certain way usually doesn't help. In fact, it can make things more confusing and painful.

Here's the truth: **There is no right or wrong way to feel.** Your emotions are valid because they are yours. They're part of how you understand what's happening around you. You can't control every feeling that shows up, and you don't have to. What you *can* control is how you respond to those feelings and the tools you use to express them. Some ways of coping are healthy and helpful; others might feel easier but hurt you in the long run. Learning the difference—and practicing healthier coping skills—takes time and support.

Not every feeling reflects the full reality of a situation, but the feeling itself is still real and worthy of attention. One of the most important skills you can learn is allowing yourself to experience emotions without judging them or trying to shut them down.

Everyone's journey—whether emotional, personal, or gender-related—is different. There is no timeline you have to follow and no standard you have to meet. You are

allowed to feel confused, angry, hopeful, scared, relieved, numb, or anything else that shows up. You're allowed to feel multiple things at the same time, even if they seem to contradict each other. **Complicated experiences lead to complicated feelings, and that's okay.**

You deserve space, support, and compassion as you figure out what you feel and who you are.