

Dear Misunderstood,

I truly appreciate that you reach out and share what you are going through right now. It sounds like you've been dealing with many issues in your life. I am sorry this happened to you, no one should have to experience this. Writing your thoughts and feelings is totally ok with me, as long as you're comfortable with it, I am just really glad you reached out! People tend to express themselves easily and thoroughly through writing, I am an example.

You've mentioned that you can't sleep, eat, skipped class, and mostly hang out in your room. It seems you are going through difficult times coming out about your identity and your family is not supporting you. You've been through a lot when you were young, being teased, bullied, and hurt, you've joined a group where you felt like you belong and was even able to come out but got bullied otherwise, that is a lot to take. But I want you to know that you are not alone. Hanging out in your room and not wanting to leave is pretty normal, sometimes people just want some quiet moments or a place to be where they feel safe and have their own world. Being able to identify yourself as "they"/"them" and not wanting to be boxed into a category is a testament of courage and strength. A 15-year-old, coming out and telling people that you don't identify as a male that was very brave! I commend you for that. You already knew what you want and who you are and that's admirable.

I am sorry that joining an online group didn't work out for you last year. The feeling of not being understood or accepted, or don't belong is not good. But don't give up. Continue looking or joining groups, who knows, one of these days, you'll find a group that will make you feel comfortable and gives you that feeling of "belongingness".

Also, I apologize for the experience you had with the Online Counselling Forum. It's frustrating when people don't understand or just don't get you, imposing something on you, or worst, bullying you. The Forum was created for a safe non-judgmental space, and free of bullying environment for individuals who are experiencing challenges in their life, I am sorry for the emotional pain and discomfort it has caused you. Sometimes we don't want to speak up because we don't want complications but have you tried telling the group that you don't want to be labeled and is not comfortable with very personal questions? It takes a lot of courage to speak up but if you were able to come out about your identity with this group, then, you have the strength within you to tell them to stop texting or emailing you horrible things because it's upsetting, hurtful, and it's not helpful. Nonetheless, our agency will be taking measures so that this incident wouldn't happen again. Our agency does not tolerate bullying. Since you have a history of being bullied when you were young because of your birthmark and being called names, your reaction of taking a break from the online forum is normal and it is a sign of determination. A manifestation of how you cope up with trauma. By the way, your birthmark is a part of your identity, it is a sign of your uniqueness.

It's understandable that you are not ready to tell your parents about your identity yet. It is normal to be hesitant especially that "identity" is a big deal not just for you but for every person in the world. We are talking about our identity here, it is who we are and what we are! You mentioned that you're parents think you are gay and hoping it would just go away. Have you tried talking to them about it? But since you said you're not ready, then you don't have to. Take all the time you

need and tell them when you feel like it is the right time. There is no rush here. This is about you and your identity, you have all the time in the world, and remember, you are the master of yourself. When the time comes that you are ready, tell them. If you need any help or support to tell them when you're ready, we're here for you.

Cutting yourself to make you feel better when situations are overwhelming is your way of coping and it is understandable. I admire your honesty and your knowledge of when to stop so as not to harm yourself. But I have to ask you this. You don't have thoughts of suicidal ideation, do you? If you do, what brings the thought? If ever this thought is playing in your mind and you don't know what to do, please know that you are not alone. Give us a call and we'll talk about it together. What I know so far is that you've been very brave and you've been managing the situation the best that you can. Individuals do recover from trauma, although it may not seem like it at the moment, over time, and with proper support, it does happen. What kind of support system do you have now, do you have friends to talk to? It sometimes helps when you share the things that are troubling you, it is like putting out weights from your chest so that you can breathe properly. What other things do you enjoy doing or do you have any place you want to go to that makes you happy? Would you be interested in knowing more about the services that we offer in our agency or other organizations that support and provide services to individuals who are going through situations like yours?

If you are up to it, there are organizations that you can try, in your own time. One of them is, "The 519", it is an organization in Toronto that is committed to the health, happiness, and full participation of the LGBTQ2S communities. You can call them at 416-392-6874 or email them at Info@The519.org, only if you are interested. They have different programs such as "Out and Out New Members Night", "Bolder Together", "Singing Out", and "Frontrunners Toronto LGBTQ2S Running Club". They also have the "Rainbow Glee'ques Coalition" which encourages participation among LGBTTSQIA communities that have an interest and passion for performing arts. You mentioned that you like art, paintings, writing stories, and making up plays to act out when you were young. I wonder if this might interest you. I have called them and asked if all the programs are welcoming new members and they said yes. No pressure, check it out if you feel like doing it.

If you feel like the loneliness is too much to take and you don't know what to do, please know that we're here for you. Our agency has a 24/7 text line counselling (416- 123- 4567) which enables individuals to text and a counsellor will respond, this would be suitable for you since you mentioned that you're not comfortable calling. And if the time comes that you are comfortable to call, contact us at 1-800-000-000, or if you are interested in exploring other options, our agency (Community Help Line) offers in-person one-on-one counselling. In this way, we could talk more about what's going on with you and come with a safety plan whenever things get tougher or overwhelming. Hope to see you soon. Remember, you are not alone! The Community Help Line and I are here for you and we're just a phone call away.

Sincerely,
Maria
(Pronouns: she/her)