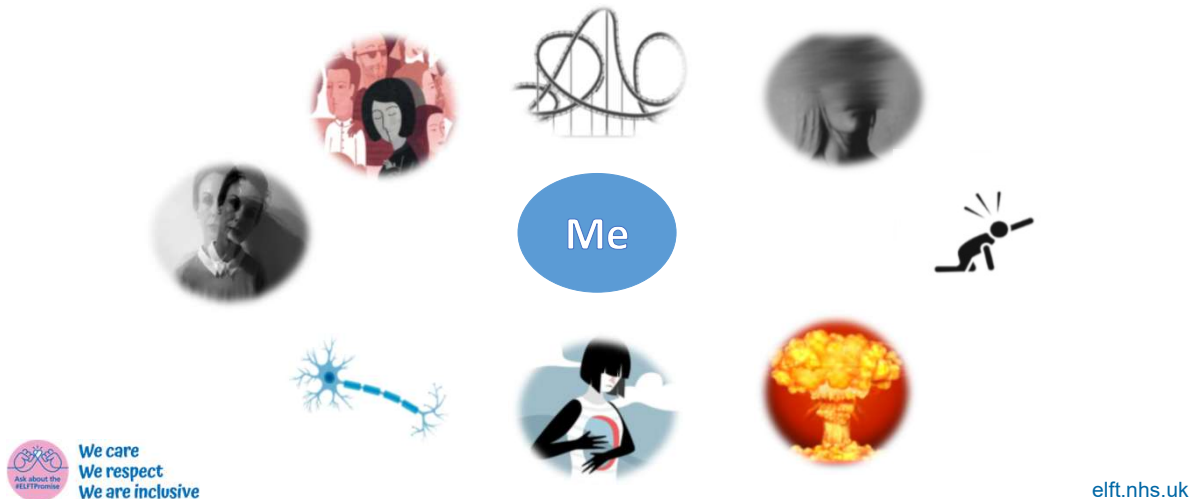


Living with a complex emotional need



Emotional rollercoaster – for me, my emotions often feel like I am on a rollercoaster blindfolded, with no way of telling which direction I am going in next. My emotions are very intense and can change so rapidly. Often in the moment I may not understand why they have changed. The rollercoaster imagery works well for me as that feeling of increasing anxiety/anticipation and the sudden stomach drop is accurate to how my body physically feels between rapidly changing emotions.

No sense of self – for me I often feel I don't know who I am or what I like or enjoy as these things can be dependent upon those around me. For me this has been something I learnt to protect myself, to form myself into the person that I feel will best please or calm those around me. This is automatic and not something I consciously choose to do, so I can be left not knowing who I am when I am not around others.

Fear of abandonment – like many with CEN I have an intense fear of rejection and abandonment. This can look like clinging onto people or situations, even if they are not good for me, but it can also look like walking away from relationships, jobs, or opportunities from the fear of being rejected. Essentially stepping away from something good to make it my own choice rather than risk getting hurt. I can also be very sensitive to perceived rejection, someone's tone of voice or words may make me feel they are abandoning or rejecting me and can result in an emotional reaction.

Explosive emotions – for some these may be external, rage, shouting, screaming. For me personally this is much more internal as my life experiences taught me it is safer to direct these emotions towards myself for example, with self harming behaviors. For me it feels explosive as things can go from relatively calm to complete shut down or loss of control very quickly, and from things that others might not consider significant, such as something small going wrong, someone's tone of voice or facial expression, or a reminder of a trauma.

Emptiness– I have always felt there was a part of me missing, which can lead to chasing new experiences to try and fill that gap. For me this has include changing studying and career directions, complete change in hobbies and interests, rapid changes in appearance and style, overspending, overeating, undereating, and other risky and self-destructive behaviours. The common theme being that nothing external can fill that gap, and the chase often makes things worse. For me, focusing on understanding and accepting myself is the only thing that has helped fill that gap.

Exposed nerve – I once heard someone describe living with a personality disorder/CEN as your emotions being like an exposed nerve and this feels very accurate to my experiences. To others what may have been an experience to brush off, for me it completely overwhelms and shuts down my ability to cope. Like for someone with an exposed nerve or covered in third degree burns, a small touch can result in extreme pain, for someone with CEN something that activates them results in extreme emotional pain, and therefore desperate attempts to cope with this.

Disassociation – As a result of trauma and long periods of intense emotions, many with CEN can also experience dissociation which is an uncontrolled response to protect oneself from traumatic experiences. For me this can result in feeling nothing at all emotionally, physical sensations feeling very numbed, feeling I am not within my body, or that the world around me is out of sync or 'foggy'.

Constant feelings of loneliness, even when around others – For me, likely as a result of molding myself to please others, being constantly on guard for potential rejection, intense and rapidly changing emotions I find it very difficult to open up and be honest with others and have genuine relationships. As a result, I tend feel very isolated, even when around other people and loved ones.