

Being chronically ill has many similarities to having a young child - it is always there and affects all parts of life. Personifying your condition - seeing it as an entity in itself that 'plays up' - can help you to separate it from your identity, a part of you but not the whole. For example, thinking of a specific recurring pain as an 'imp' or naming your illness. It can be especially hard to separate mentally from being sick when you have an illness such as ME/CFS, fibromyalgia or endometriosis that affects so much of functioning and quality of life, and can easily overwhelm.

Here are some musings on that unruly child, I mean illness:

- Illness, like having children, can create a gulf between you and friends who aren't in the same situation
- Your social life and choices can become restricted
- Your sleep and energy levels will be severely affected
- Your life might become very unpredictable
- You move from freedom to restriction in the smallest of ways
- It can be a challenge to your relationship with your partner
- How you travel around may have to change
- Your priorities change      - Your sex life may be affected
- Future plans can go out of the window   - Your career may be derailed
- You may experience emotions you have never felt before....
- You may find it hard to admit how difficult it is
- There will be big financial implications
- You may swing from coping to feeling overwhelmed
- Your life may never feel quite your own again
- Decisions have to take account of something other than just what you want to be doing to manage life well and healthily.....however:
  
- Your values and what you want from life may radically change, often for the better
- Your life goes down a path that you couldn't have imagined, one that brings all kinds of new experiences, both negative and positive

- You will meet people you never would have before
- Some friendships will become deeper and stronger
- Good routines that support the body clock (in sleep, nutrition and activity) can improve quality of life for all
- A new found appreciation of living in the moment and life's small pleasures can emerge

If only illness bought half the joy of parenthood! - but it's not all bad. As we love a child as a part of ourselves, no matter what he or she does, and hopefully retain a sense of our selves outside being a parent, maybe we can learn to embrace the experience of ill health and the changes that it brings because it is happening anyway, and doesn't have to define us. Of course, having children when you are ill is another matter altogether....