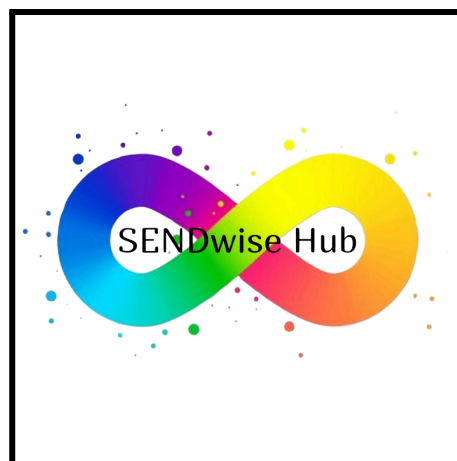
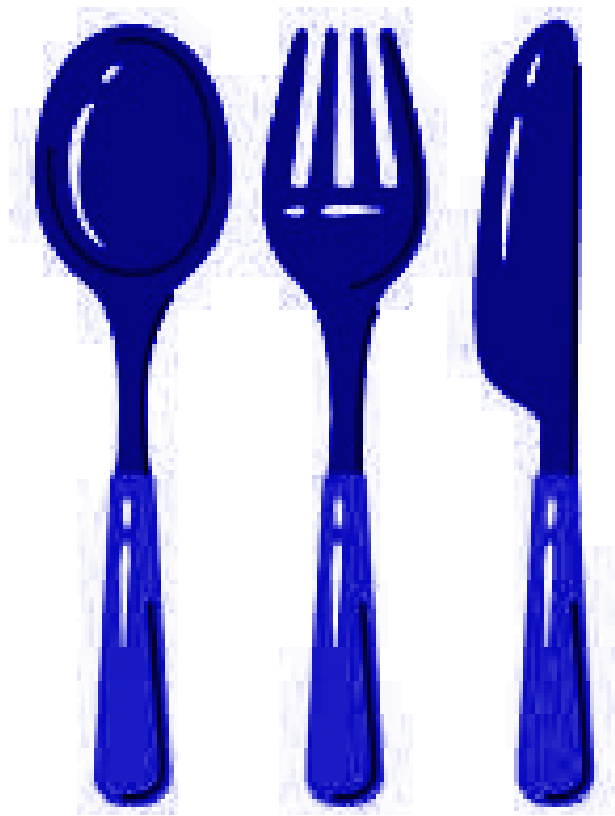


INTRODUCTION TO THE SPOON, FORK & KNIFE THEORIES



Spoon theory

If you'd wake up with 12 spoons to last you a whole day, how would you use them?

Before we get into that let's clarify what the spoon theory is. Spoon theory is a metaphor that is used to describe the amount of mental or physical energy a person has available for daily activities and tasks.

Every day presents itself with a variety of stressors and overwhelming sensory experiences which use up spoons. Other factors, like a bad night's sleep, can influence the number of spoons with which one wakes up to tackle the day ahead.

Some activities use up more spoons than others depending on the person's differences and fluctuating capacity. Everything from literally getting out of bed, to having breakfast, to going to school to eventually going back to bed.

As most people may wake up with an unlimited amount of spoons, neurodivergent individuals don't. Hence why it takes planning and preparation to make sure there's always a spoon reserve.

The spoons are divided into physical, mental and emotional ones. For instance, it can be that your child is physically exhausted but mentally restless. A meltdown uses a lot of emotional spoons which can leave them in a dysfunctional state for quite a while after. It's difficult to try to maintain a balance at the best of times, but as they may practically run on empty it's important to understand the causes as opposed to the effects.

As spoons are being used up throughout the day, the energy levels (mental, emotional, physical) diminish, which can lead to burnout, meltdowns, shutdowns and overwhelms. It's my understanding that the trick is to find a suitable strategy in order to help replenish the spoons before they run out.





This theory sparks up a conversation which in turn leads to accommodation and lack of judgement. It's important for us to understand that each autistic person starts their day with a limited number of spoons and it's our duty to help them preserve them to last the whole day.

Think about adjusting the demands according to the tolerance and energy they have available.

Offer sensory breaks, adapt the environment and just be aware of how their communication changes once the spoons start getting low.

Also understand fluctuating capacity - just because they were able to do something yesterday, doesn't mean they are able today.

Think about how YOU would cope with just having one spoon left and no way of "buying" any more..

Fork theory

"Fork theory came about as an elaboration of the phrase, "Stick a fork in me, I'm done." Unlike Spoon Theory, which posits something you have at the beginning of the day that gets taken away, Fork Theory says that everyone is stuck with forks, large and small, all day — and eventually, they reach their limit."

****(more here <https://jenrose.com/fork-theory/>)****

Essentially, every day our children get stuck with forks. From small annoyances like feeling hungry or thirsty, to big ass pitchforks like not being able to watch their favourite film or experiencing sensory overload. Just as the spoons, they have a limited amount of forks they can be stuck with before the limit is reached and a meltdown or shutdown occurs.

One of the differences between spoons and forks is that forks are cumulative. It may be the smallest fork of the day that sets our children off, if they've already met the quota of forks for the day. So, they pile up forks whereas they lose their spoons.

Spoons = output limit. Forks = input limit.
With me so far? OK..

Spoons and forks can sometimes coincide/overlap depending on various situations but are not mutually exclusive. I would say you can build an immunity to forks and the number you have available varies from day to day. Having too many forks can mean our children can't access their spoons, and dealing with removing forks themselves is often very stressful and exhausting.

How many forks are YOU willing or capable of taking before you reach your limit?





We can try and help remove some of the forks that have already been stuck in via means of accommodations.

Other times we just have to all abandon ship, reassess and come back to it later.

Removing noticeable daily stressors can also help in the future.

Do not add any unnecessary demands and take note of the existing overwhelm .

Oh and the best help we can offer? Don't be a fork thrower!



Spoons = output limit
Forks = input limit
A lot of spoons = good
A lot of forks = bad
Spoons = energy
Forks = stressors

Knife theory

This metaphor is a companion to the spoon theory. Essentially, when our children run out of spoons they start using knives as a last resort.

So, a knife is the last thing they have available to push through. But it comes at a cost..

A knife cannot do what a spoon does (try eating soup with a knife, it won't work). They may be able to do what is needed but not as well, as they are accessing tools not designed for the task at hand.

Also, the effort it would take would be colossal and ultimately extremely damaging.

To summarise the metaphor, a knife represents the overspending of energy that draws from the future.

They are borrowing from tomorrow's allowance, which means that not only are they suffering today but they'll also suffer tomorrow.

It's a vicious circle that is exhausting and harmful.

The eventuality is, they would burnout should they be forced to reach beyond their feasible limits.





Don't push someone beyond their limits. If the spoons are running out, stop.

Allow time and space to replenish, make adjustments and take the struggles seriously.

Needless to say.. Don't play with knives, you'll get hurt.