

# Autism West Midlands Online Conference October 2020



# Autism & Spoon Theory

## Conference 2020

**autism**  
west midlands

# Spoon Theory



- What it is – where it came from

- How it works

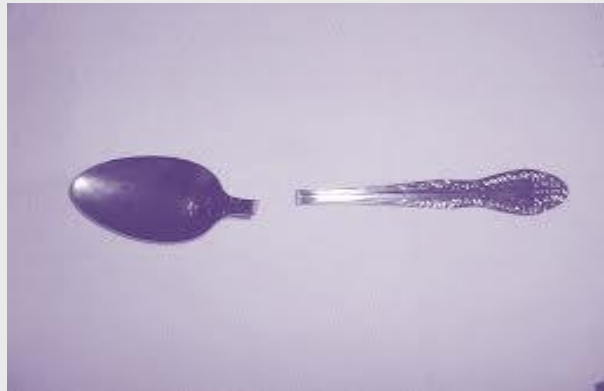
- Spoons and autism

- Using spoon theory

- Further info and links

# What on earth is “SpoonTheory”?

- The **spoon theory** or **spoon metaphor** is a disability metaphor used to explain the reduced amount of mental and physical energy available for activities for living and productive tasks that may result from disability or chronic illness.



# Who came up with it?



## Christine Miserandino

Auto-immune disease  
called Lupus

Conversation with a  
friend who wanted to  
know how lupus  
impacted on her day to  
day (which she wrote up  
in an essay while she  
was a student in 2003)

# Christine Miserandino



“Difference between being sick and being healthy is having to make choices, or to consciously think about things when the rest of the world doesn’t have to”

# Christine Miserandino



“Healthy people have the luxury of a life without choices. A gift which is taken for granted. They start each day with a limitless amount of possibilities and energy to do whatever they desire. They generally do not have to consider the effects of their actions.”

# A learning opportunity



She made her friend count the spoons she was holding

“When you are healthy you expect to have a never ending supply of spoons”



# A learning opportunity



Christine then removed spoons from her friend for each task, activity, event or situation which “cost” her either physically, emotionally or mentally

# A learning opportunity



Her friend was forced to  
make choices and think  
about things differently –  
it made a big impact

# Spoon rules...

- Spoons are finite

- When spoons are “spent” they are gone

- All spoons used = lack of energy/increase in symptoms – impact into the next day possible

# Spoon rules...

- 
- Used spoons are replenished through rest and self care

- 
- Balance between spoons and everyday demands = prioritising

- 
- Letting go – you can't do everything!

# Spoon Theory Explained



# Spoon Theory Explained

The graphic is a dark purple rectangle with a white border. It is divided into five horizontal sections, each representing a daily activity. Each section contains an icon, the activity name in large, hand-drawn white letters, a short explanation in smaller white text, and a 'SPOON COST' indicated by a number of white spoon icons. The activities are: Waking Up (alarm clock icon, 1 spoon), Showering (showerhead icon, 2 spoons), Get Dressed (shirt icon, 2 spoons), Breakfast (plate with fork and spoon icon, 1 spoon), and Working (person with briefcase icon, 3 spoons).

Activity	Icon	Description	Spoon Cost
WAKING UP	Alarm clock	WHEN I AM STIFF AND IN PAIN THIS IS A SLOW PROCESS.	1
SHOWERING	Showerhead	SORE JOINTS MAKES THIS EXTRA DIFFICULT	2
GET DRESSED	Shirt	SORE HANDS? BUTTONS ARE OUT OF THE QUESTION	2
BREAKFAST	Plate with fork and spoon	TAKING MEDS ON AN EMPTY STOMACH IS A BAD IDEA	1
WORKING	Person with briefcase	I HAVE GOOD AND BAD DAYS, THIS IS A GOOD DAY	3

# Spoon Theory Explained

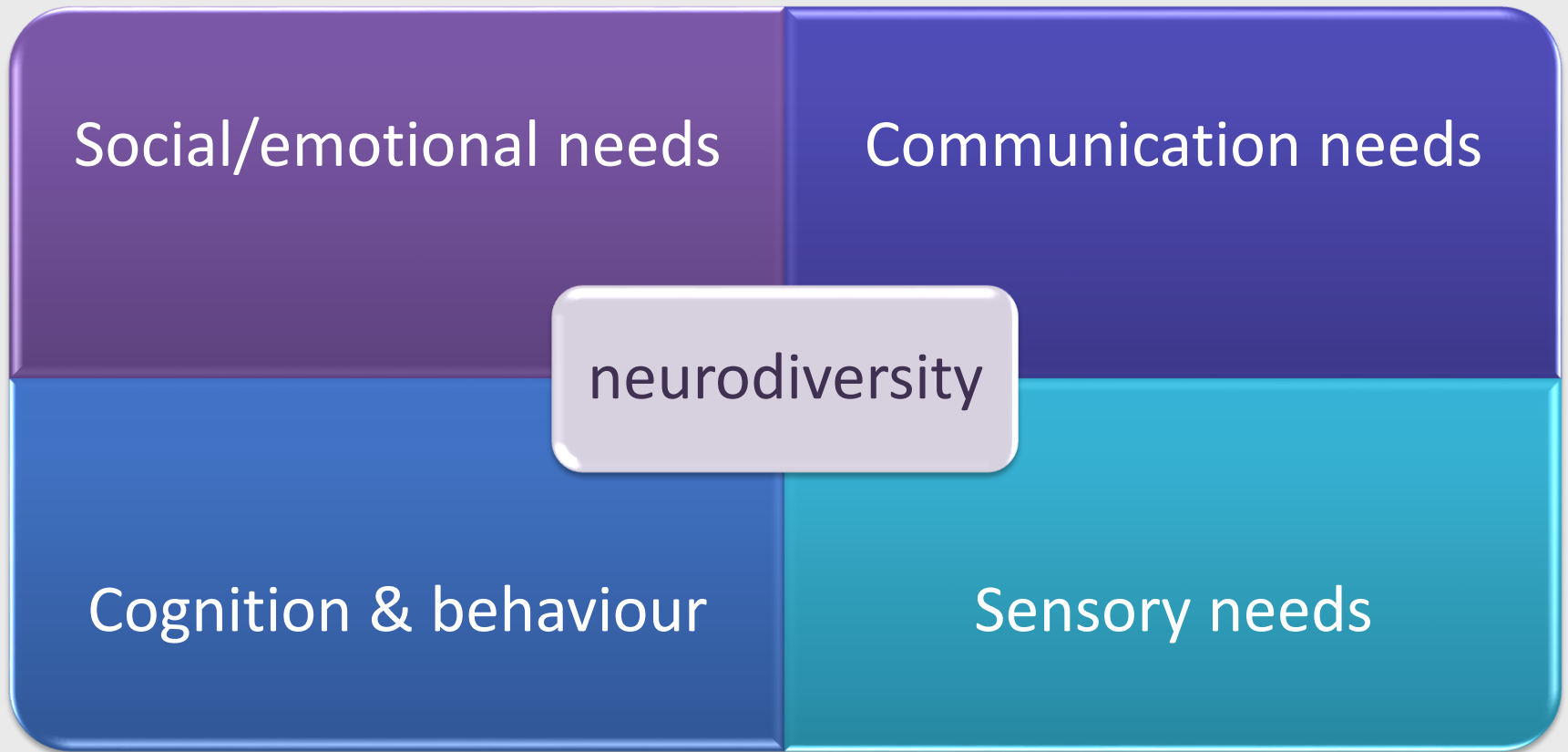


**REMAINING  
SPOONS:**




WILL USE THESE THREE TO GET HOME, EAT AND CHANGE INTO MY PJ'S  
KEEP IN MIND I CAN USE TOMORROWS SPOONS TO DO EXTRA,  
BUT WILL HAVE LESS SPOONS TO GET THROUGH THE DAY.

# Spoons & autism





# Spoon Theory and Autism

- 
- Healthy neurotypicals have a never-ending supply of spoons – the theory can help them understand how activities they take for granted can “cost” autistic people
  - Visual : supports understanding and communication
  - Promotes self care and regulation

# Not all spoons are the same



Different sizes



Big spoons for sensory?



Some spoons leak!

# Spoons are disability region-specific – an adult perspective

Source:  
musingsofanaspie





“Most people have more spoons in some areas than others. That is why someone who doesn’t have the spoons to go to a movie with their family might have the energy to stay at home and build an intricate scale model of Narnia out of lollypop sticks”

# Think about your child's spoons...



How many? Different sizes for different activities/different days



What happens when they run out?



How do they replenish their spoons?



Can you recognise when their spoon drawer is full?

# Replenishing spoons when you are autistic



Sleep/rest



Time alone



Special interests

# Replenishing spoons when you are autistic

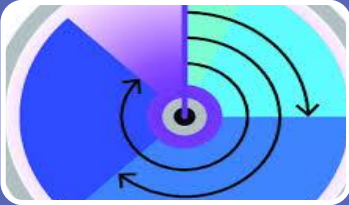
## Individual



# Replenishment strategies need to be...



Things that can be done regularly, even on their worst day



Take varying amounts of time (they won't always have a whole day to recharge)



Aren't "spoon thieves" in disguise!



# Getting the balance right



Prioritise



Ration  
spoons



Borrow  
someone  
else's spoon  
(ask for  
help)



Plan

# Introducing the idea to children/young people



Appropriate to their level of understanding

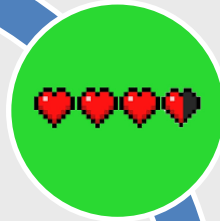


Practical – use actual spoons

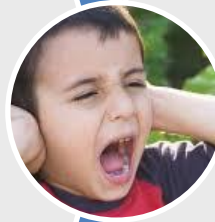


Theoretical – Minecraft example...

# Using a special interest...



Health bar



Things which drain health bar



Things which add to health bar

# Positive impact of spoon theory

“Hopefully, if all goes well, the letting go combined with all of the other conservation strategies will lead to that day when I discover an extra spoon or two has appeared in my drawer”



Source:  
musingsofanaspie

# Christine Miserandino



“I have learned to live life with an extra spoon in my pocket”

## Further information & links



- [Musingsofanaspie.com](https://musingsofanaspie.com)

- [Spectra.blog](https://spectra.blog)

- [Themighty.com](https://themighty.com)

- [Kirstenlindsmith.wordpress.com](https://kirstenlindsmith.wordpress.com)

- [Youtube](https://www.youtube.com)

# Questions and Answers

