

Side by Side Living

a manifesto

for healthy human relationships

by Kate Arms

Relationships between people are healthy when people bring their authentic selves into relationship.

Each person has their own story, their own self, their own choices to make.

Each person is complete on their own and thrives when in alignment with their own inner wisdom.

When two people meet, one initiates conversation, the other responds. If this connection develops further, each person takes turns leading with the other following their lead.

At first there is often a clear sense of who is driving the connection forward in any given moment.

As the relationship continues, the source of leadership may no longer be obvious.

If this happens, the two are responding to each other with such engagement and subtlety that they seem to be acting as a single unit. The interactions between them feel easy and mutual to both individuals.

But this honeymoon phase cannot last in a healthy relationship.

Inevitably, one person's inner authority will steer them in a direction that the other person, in touch with their own inner authority, doesn't follow. The blended unit will dissolve again into two separate individuals.

After the blended state ruptures, the individuals have to make a choice:

They can separate completely and drop their connection or they can recreate their connection in a new way.

Each individual is a unique, whole self who can act independently. They can choose to connect a little, a lot, or not at all.

A connection can involve leaning on each other and supporting each other, walking beside each other, or doing separate things for some time. Whatever the intimacy of the connection, each person remains responsible for taking care of themselves.

If the people lean on each other without simultaneously remaining responsible for themselves, the unhealthy result is co-dependency.

In a healthy relationship, a person who supports another does it by choice, and has the capacity to make other choices as well.

Each person expresses their needs to the other and does not attempt to provide support to the other person in any way that would require sacrificing their own integrity or values.

Being present with and connected to another person requires allowing them to have an impact.

Not only must you let people act in accordance with their own inner authority, you must accept it when they do.

The more space one person makes to witness another person with compassionate non-judgment, the more opportunity there is for intimacy.

Willingness of each person to show up authentically and with their whole self and to witness the other's whole self without judgment or agenda creates the environment for healthy relationships where both individuals can thrive.

There will be ruptures, times of conflict.

That's inevitable.

Even if no one is ever tired, hungry, sick, or cranky, there will be differences of opinion and conflicting authentic desires and values. And the reality is that people are human and have bad days.

What keeps relationships alive is reconnection, the choice that both individuals make to find new ways of being connected to each other after a conflict or divergence.

At first, reconciliation takes the relationship back to conscious leading and following, though it may shift back into blended leadership quickly if the underlying connection is deep.

Throughout the process, each person remains responsible for their own values and integrity and assumes that the other person is competent and is taking responsibility for themselves.

The hardest part of relating in this way may be agreeing to play by these rules and gently reminding each other of that commitment when slips occur.

Western culture gives us mixed messages about independence. Child-rearing practices often push children to certain types of independence earlier than other cultures do. Our family and business cultures often involve stoic independence and self-reliance.

On the other hand, western notions of romantic love and passion-based marriages throughout popular culture include myths of lack and dependence. The myth that each person has one person who will complete them runs deep.

In the Side by Side Living model, each person is considered a unique individual with the capacity to connect to their inner authority and the power to make choices in accordance with that wisdom.

Things get more complicated in groups larger than a pair. Each pair of people within the group has their own direct connection and the interlocking connections create a group body that has a dynamic of interactions that tends to exert pressure on individuals to conform.

In small groups, individuals can make agreements with the other people individually to engage in a healthy manner. As groups get larger, intentional shaping of structures by leaders becomes more important because those structures impact the relationships between individuals who have not connected directly with each other.

At its core, however, a group is made up of the relationships between its members.

If the individuals who make up the group engage in authentic relationships based on respect for each other's wisdom about their own lives, the group is likely to either naturally occur in forms that support individual thriving or to burst out of restrictive boundaries and reform in a healthier way.

The greatest gift that we can give another person is to stand in our own inner authority and actively look for the best things about them.

This non-judgmental, compassionate witnessing gives them space and permission to be their brightest selves.

When two people relate to each other in this way, the relationship brings out the best in both of them.

The healthiest thing individuals can do both for themselves and for the greater society is to embrace the assumption that every adult is competent, with powers of agency and wisdom about what is true for them.

How to Change the World through Side by Side Living

- ◆ Let the ideas in this manifesto inform how you relate to other people.
- ◆ Gather with others who approach the world this way to support each other.
- ◆ Share this manifesto and spread the word.

ABOUT THIS MANIFESTO

Many of the ideas in this manifesto come from InterPlay, a system of principles and birthright practices including storytelling, movement, voice, and stillness used to integrate mind, body, and spirit. InterPlay is grounded in community, creativity, and the ethic of play. The Side by Side Living model of healthy relationships was developed by Kate Arms through applying the principles and practices of InterPlay in her work as a Creativity and Life Coach.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kate Arms is a Creativity and Life Coach, a writer in a multitude of genres, and an actor and theatre director. Her book *Unblock: Writing Prompts for Works in Progress* is available from Signal Fire Press. Her essays, short stories, and poetry have appeared in *The Artist's Road*, *The Creativity Post*, *The Word Weaver*, *An Intense Life*, and the anthology *Renaissance*. Her novel, *The Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter* was runner-up for best juvenile novel in the Muskoka Novel Marathon 2014.

She is committed to helping people live meaningful lives according to their own standards. She supports her clients as they navigate the gaps between their realities and their dreams so they can create the lives and businesses they want.

The ethic of play, strengths-based growth models, mind-body integration, and respect for the wisdom each of her clients hold about their own lives and practices are the foundations of her coaching practice.

For more information or to sign up for her free newsletter, please visit www.signalfirecoaching.com.

Additional copies of this manifesto can be downloaded free at www.signalfirecoaching.com/manifesto.