



Joe and Sophie make a change in their Relationship

By Mary Disharoon, MA, LMFT

Joe and Sophie are thinking about getting married after living together for three years. Joe is a hard worker, spends a lot of time making money and getting ahead in his field. Sophie is an artist who works out of a studio in the city. She has independent money and so has enjoyed the freedom to pursue her painting without the need to take on too many jobs and push herself.

When they met and fell in love they really enjoyed one another's differences. Sophie liked Joe's ambition and masculine ability to be out in the world and succeed; Joe loved Sophie's artistic sensibility and her way of creating warm, social relationships. They thought they were a perfect blend and each felt very lucky to have met the other.

Now, with their decision to get married and ultimately have children, the vulnerability in the relationship is increasing. Joe feels the pressure to be more successful, to support his growing family. Sophie is fearful of losing her autonomy with her art and is concerned she might have to raise their children alone since Joe works so much. She isn't sure she's capable of adjusting to all of this.

Joe has become the responsible one in the relationship, the one who makes things happen in the outer world. He handles lots of tasks and knows how to assert himself. Sophie is more open to her imagination and creativity, but she struggles with staying on task and isn't very self-assured in her ability to survive in the outer world.

As their vulnerability increases, Joe and Sophie start to polarize against one another and they don't appreciate their differences as much anymore. Joe starts to wonder if Sophie's creativity is really a disguise for being flaky, inconsistent and unreliable and Sophie starts to see Joe as hardened and unavailable, always pushing himself to succeed more and more.

What is going on here is that Sophie and Joe are living out of their Primary Selves. Joe is responsible and direct, practical and determined; Sophie is playful and indirect, more childlike and passive. This worked early in their relationship when they each wanted to complete the missing parts of the other, but the relationship is now starting to unravel because they are faced with a big decision that is creating stress. They begin to feel their need to change and grow.

Instead of continuing to judge and resent one another, Sophie and Joe can use Voice Dialogue to understand and grow their relationship and themselves. They can begin by becoming more conscious of which inner selves they have identified with and which inner selves in them are underdeveloped.

Sophie can start to own her power selves more. She can start to separate a little from the energies she usually identifies with and bring in more of her own responsible, independent and capable selves. These are parts of her that will create order and routine to her days and to her mothering. Joe will feel reassured to see these develop in Sophie and it will take the pressure off of his own responsible selves who really don't feel safe with Sophie and question how responsible a mother she can be.

Joe, on the other hand needs to separate from his power selves, especially his pusher and responsible self and start to open to and integrate the parts of himself that are looser, more relaxed, open and warm. He needs to find this balance in himself so he can enjoy more of his life with Sophie and eventually with their baby.

In a Voice Dialogue session, Sophie and Joe can watch one another experience their primary and disowned selves. They can become aware of how they have held opposite energies for one another and grow into holding those energies for themselves.

For example, Sophie can speak from her free-flowing creative self and then move into the aware ego position and then move into her more organized competent self. By Joe witnessing this, he will see that Sophie is more than he ever realized. He can learn about her different selves and the vulnerability that lies beneath them.

Likewise Sophie can watch Joe speak from his responsible side and then move over and speak from a more playful, laid back self. She can watch his process, and appreciate the reasons why he is identified with one energy system more than another.

Voice Dialogue can help Joe and Sophie start shifting the energy patterns in their relationship. They can become more developed and well-rounded as individuals and as a couple. They can participate in a deeper intimacy with one another by revealing their many selves, and the underlying vulnerabilities that these selves protect.

Being able to communicate and witness and experience each other in this capacity is a real and deep way to be in relationship. With Voice Dialogue, Joe and Sophie have found a method to effectively use with their relationship to keep it vital, alive, healthy and growing.

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