

4-2018

Mentors Wanted

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Recommended Citation

Slikkers, Ingrid, "Mentors Wanted" (2018). *Lake Union Herald*. 2.
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Mentors Wanted

The latest school shooting has raised so many issues, suggestions and strong emotions, and unanswered questions for teachers, parents, community and lawmakers, not to mention the Church.



▲ Ingrid Slikkers

Is there something I can immediately do with my own sons or kids in my circle of influence?

I remember attending a training early in my career where the presenter remarked that every child needs six adults that are crazy about them to grow in a healthy emotional way. Sounds like God's ideal plan, doesn't it? Two parents and two sets of grandparents sound heavenly. It is sometimes easy to think that children have many adults that care for them in school or church and somehow we fall prey to thinking, *Someone else has this covered*. Have we looked around our church, school, or even neighborhood, and actually counted how many kids had more than one adult that truly had their back? When is the last time you turned to your own child and asked, "If you were in trouble (not just physical trouble), who could you call outside of our family for help or emotional support and prayer?" Many of our children, sadly, can't think of any, or maybe only one adult, that thinks they are amazing — regardless of their behavior, even if they are surrounded by adults.

This last February, my sister-in-law invited me to a women's retreat in Traverse City, Michigan. The focus was on discipleship. The weekend ended with a prayer during which the older women placed their hands on the younger women and, in solidarity, asked for the courage to mentor others and also allow oneself to be mentored. I let this simmer in my thoughts for a few days. Professionally I provide mentoring for young therapists entering the field and also students at

Andrews, but this is a part of my employment expectations. Am I providing mentoring for someone on my own time — out of my comfort zone? Did my sons have someone outside of our family praying for them by name and for the battles they may be confronting? If someone asked my boys, "Do you have a mentor?", what would they say and what could I do about that? Could it be that mentoring is not as complicated as I was thinking it was?

So I brought these thoughts to my family. After the initial eye rolling that happens when mom approaches with some new and uncomfortable idea that she has read or heard about, it was decided that we would do something intentionally. My sons each have searched out an older male that they admire and have requested prayers from them and connection at least once a month, granting permission to be asked about their spiritual life, successes and struggles. This was hugely out of their comfort zone and took a lot of courage. Then they each selected a younger boy in the community to intentionally connect with and pray for. My husband and I also are in the process of asking individuals to check in with us on our spiritual walk and then specifically choosing those we would like to seek out and mentor. This is pushing us in unexpected ways. Would you be willing to join us in this? Can we decide to be crazy about a younger person out there? ■

Ingrid Weiss Slikkers is assistant professor of Social Work at Andrews University, a Child and Family therapist, and is constantly learning more about God because of her sons.