

CHOOSING BUILDING VS REPAIRING

By Viki Rife



The first grader stood screaming at the top of her lungs. “I don’t want to go to lesson! I don’t want to sit down! I don’t want to go!”

Anyone who has dealt with children will recognize this kind of scenario. Whether you’re a parent, a teacher, or a caring adult, you feel the responsibility to make a choice on how you will handle it. Do you punish the girl for her outburst and demand compliance? Or do you enter the chaos of her soul and discover what’s at the root of her meltdown, helping her navigate the complicated world of childhood emotions?

In this particular case, the young woman leading the Sisters Mentoring with a Mission (SMM) discipleship group had a pretty good idea what her options were. She had just gone through training that helped her identify the behavior as a symptom of trauma. She recognized this outburst as a defense mechanism and was able to enter the chaos. She quietly invited the girl to color, allowing her to calm down enough to express some of what was upsetting her. This willingness to get down on the girl’s level aided the child in regulating her feelings. She felt safe, validated and loved by that simple action. It allowed her to open her heart to receive spiritual truths much more than if she had been forced to engage in class time.

Research has shown that our fast-paced, demanding and often dysfunctional society has taken a toll on our children. They need boundaries and discipline, but they also need to have people in their lives whom they can trust, people who are willing to come beside them, enter their world, and help them discover better ways of handling the anxiety and helplessness they often face.

As women, we often know instinctively we can have a part in helping girls grow up to be wise, stable women. Titus 2:3-5 admonishes us: “Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.” The question we find ourselves asking is, “When should such training start?” Studies have shown that by age 13 most people have already decided what their values in life will be and whether they will follow Christ or not. It’s obvious that we can’t wait until they are adults to start training them.

The belief that “It’s easier to build a girl than to repair a woman” has been a driving concept in the development and continuation of Sisters Mentoring with a Mission. Traditionally this ministry has been offered by churches as part of their programming, a practice still very valuable today. In addition, since 2013, Nicole Miller, Director of Girls’ Ministries, has led after-school discipleship groups in public schools in the Warsaw, Indiana, area. The ministry has grown from one elementary school to four elementary schools, a middle school and the high school. A majority of these girls do not attend a church. This is their only opportunity to hear about Christ. About 40 volunteers are involved in teaching these groups, many of them college students.

Nicole’s interest in helping leaders know how to reach girls led her to pursue a doctorate in Educational Ministries. As part of her dissertation, she developed and implemented a leadership training model for women who work with the SMM program. She was able to run the inaugural training program in the fall of 2019. The women who went through the training engaged in content that equipped them to better lead SMM as well as gave them the opportunity to interact and collaborate as leaders.

Upon graduating with her doctoral degree in May 2020, Nicole plans to modify and update the training so that it is accessible not only to leaders who work with SMM but those who are interested in working with girls. Topics covered include how to care for your own soul and the souls of others, the stages of development children and teens experience and what they need at each stage, how children learn at each stage, how to mentor girls in a transformational way, and much more. These training modules will be downloadable and customizable video-sessions available through RightNow Media. Key leaders can preview and select the modules they feel are most needed by their volunteers. To learn more about this training or about discipling girls, contact smm@wgusa.org.