

**Topic:** Cyber-gender: The influence of social media and the digital age on the EQ development of boys and girls.

**Speakers:** Megan du Toit and Megan-Lee Coetzee

**Speaker Bio:**

Megan-Lee Coetzee graduated *summa cum laude* from the University of Johannesburg with a Master's degree in Educational Psychology. She is registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa and was previously employed at Kingsway Christian School as School Counsellor, and at St Stithians Girls' Preparatory as Educational Psychologist. Megan-Lee currently fills the role of Educational Psychologist and Head of the Learner Support Department, and is a member of the executive team, at HeronBridge Preparatory. Furthermore, she spends time working with children across age ranges in private practice. Through the combined experiences of working in both monastic and co-educational schools, Megan-Lee has developed her proficiency in supporting and guiding both boys and girls through developmental milestones, through the preventative means of Social-Emotional Lessons. These aim to provide children with the skills needed to cope emotionally and socially in their environments, both online and offline.

The professional scope of practice for Educational Psychologists, and specifically those working with children, encompasses assisting with putting into place preventative and curative measures that facilitate and enhance social, emotional and cognitive wellbeing. Thus, both Megan and Megan-Lee have experience in working with children and in observing children's interactions with technology and social media. Based on this, they look forward to sharing their knowledge of skills that can be matured in our children, to better prepare them for online engagement, whilst still maintaining holistic wellbeing.

**Topic Description:**

In the digital age schools, parents, teachers and children need to adapt to rapid advances in technology, to adequately prepare children for a highly connected future. There is a growing body of research which supports and recognises the benefits of developing 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in children. There is also much literature providing substantial evidence that now, more than ever, our children are living in a world that demands social and emotional awareness. However, professionals working with and studying childhood and adolescent behavior and wellbeing, have become increasingly aware of the implicit need for the deliberate development of EQ and SQ skills in children living in the digital age. In particular, these should relate to navigating complex social-emotional dynamics associated with social media and technology use.

Based on their experiences within school environments that promote the use of social media and technology, Megan and Megan-Lee believe that justice can only be done to the process of equipping our children with the necessary skills, once we have paused to consider and question the following:

- Do boys and girls respond differently to the use of social media and technology?
- Do boys and girls represent and connect with another on social media differently?
- Do boys and girls engage with social media and technology for different reasons?

Based on this, are there then gender specific skills we need to focus on building in boys and girls to empower them to responsibly engage on social media platforms?

This presentation will explore gender aspects of the digital age, including the different challenges faced by boys and girls in their engagements with social media and technology. Attention will primarily be drawn towards focusing on the social-emotional and EQ aspects of gender differences in the digital age, with reference to how technology and social media influences the development of boys' and girls' self-esteem, identity and social-emotional wellbeing. Megan and Megan-Lee will then further explore some of the key gender-specific and non-specific soft skills which should be developed and addressed when educating boys and girls on their use of technology and social media.