



HILTON COLLEGE

A letter from
the Head

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Dear Parents,

On Friday last, we held a moving funeral for an Old Boy who matriculated in 2015. Many of our senior boys were in attendance having known him when he was here. This tragedy, alongside the passing of a few other young Hiltonians necessitates pause.

Our world has become so much more complex.

I do believe that our young people are faced with a greater number of choices and a greater number of challenges growing up today. These challenges also seem to have far-reaching consequences when poor decisions are made; perhaps more so than for previous generations.

Society's understanding of mental health has improved significantly over the past few years and we are more aware of certain conditions and indeed of the treatment of these. This is reassuring.

However, I'm not sure all men have embraced this understanding and indeed the acknowledgement of the realities of these conditions sufficiently. The Uber-masculine persona remains a dominant way of being which so easily clouds the ability to recognise fragility and to live with it.

Growing up at a boys' boarding school in one's formative years presents both a challenge and an opportunity: we can speak directly to the idea of masculinity and to the concern of mental health among teenage boys in particular.

Towards the end of 2017 we added Mike Pitchford to the team at Hilton. Mike is a Clinical Psychologist who was schooled at an all boys' school and who has a strong affinity for teenagers and their struggles. Mike is slightly alternative in his approach to life and this is a terrific ingredient in his ability to get boys to question and engage as they learn to make meaning of their place in this world.

Mike is ably assisted by Mrs Lizelle van Niekerk who is a trained counsellor and social worker who assists boys in their career choices and university application processes.

Mike spends time in the boarding houses engaging with boys around matters of the heart and mind. Alongside the dedicated team of Housemaster, Deputy Housemaster, and the Assistant Housemasters in each house, we are well positioned to ensure the best possible care for all our boys.

This more complex world is also a far more crowded space to inhabit - especially for teenagers.

The crowding comes from the multiple voices experienced in the numerous social media apps and the plethora of opportunities available to our children in this day and age. A simple case of feeling sad can be shared with so many in one's virtual world; this presents a dilemma in that young people are ill-equipped to navigate and process these multiple voices. In by-gone eras one had but a few friends on hand to discuss one's feelings with and one needed to then make do.

I'm not sure whether the multitude of voices is helpful or whether the **access** to these voices is perhaps too easy and consequently overwhelming and detrimental.

If we consider the marvel of WhatsApp, we are faced with such a tremendous opportunity, but at the same time - a new world of communication (often mono-syllabic in nature) but communication that is instant; that includes multiple recipients and responders; communication that often lends itself to thinking out loud - without due care and concern for the consequence of choices of words or phrases.

I raise nothing new. It is merely an observation that we parents, in our new world, must be alive to and must navigate. Our young men are sadly ill-equipped - cognitively - to navigate the intricacies that come with this world of communication that is **instant, always on** and so pervasive.

We need to assist them.

Sadly, however, we model poorly in this area of our behavior as adults. We too have become slaves to the pervasiveness of technology and we have every reason to justify our behaviors. I fear we are at fault.

I raise this to challenge you and to request you to be intentional in your modelling of your cell-phone habits in particular. I also ask that you prioritise conversations with your son - create a time when his phone must be in another room so as to ensure you are connecting with him such that he is not distracted.

Some of the challenges our boys face are linked to a feeling of dis-connectedness - despite their circle of 'virtual' friends.

Boys need to engage.

Boys won't easily sit across from an adult and divulge their fears and their failures (although some do) but they will share parts of themselves when they are busy with something else; perhaps a game of golf; a fishing trip; fixing or making something together in the garage.

My encouragement is for us, the adults, to ensure we are creating the space and time to engage with our teenagers. It can be on our terms! We need to be intentional in this so that our boys (in particular) are not left wondering whether they are being heard or that there is an ear that will listen and a shoulder to lean on. Our hearts go out to the many young people, in particular, who feel that they are helpless and hopeless.

Our frantic, loud and cluttered world requires an antidote. As the significant adult in your son's life, you must be this antidote. Please **MAKE** the time.



CAMPUS DEVELOPMENTS

We are especially privileged to have generous gifts from two parents to enable us to upgrade both Gilfillan and Mansergh. This has also presented an opportunity to develop a new field adjacent to the Water-based Astro. This work has begun.

Gilfillan has been in need of maintenance and we now have the luxury to remodel the surface such that we can get the drainage and the levels sorted out.

Mansergh is to become our 1st XI soccer pitch and was also in need of levelling and re-grassing to bring it up to standard.

We are indebted to the generosity of these two families and we will honour them at a later stage.

Regards,
George

..... Deeply Traditional. Refreshingly Contemporary