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Media Release

Internet Users Must Switch Off To Beat Addiction, Say Counsellors

Internet users must learn to switch off and overcome their online addiction, according to the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP).

The organisation for accredited counsellors and psychotherapists in Ireland has warned that increasing numbers of people are losing control of the amount of time that they spend online and that therapists are seeing an increase in internet and social media addiction.

Citing a recent study carried out by Wilhelm Hofmann of Chicago University's Booth Business School, the IACP has warned that using social media can be even more addictive than cigarettes or alcohol.

"Being connected to friends and business associates has clear benefits, but many people, especially young people, find the desire to use Facebook or Twitter so strong that it's affecting their personal relationships, their studies and often their jobs," said Shane Kelly, Professional Services Manager with the IACP.

"Many people find it impossible to put down their mobile even when having a meal with friends, attending a meeting or while out on a first date," he added.

The IACP warned that due to the easy access of the internet via mobile devices that social media and internet addiction can be very difficult to control, especially as it seems like a far less harmful pursuit than using drugs or nicotine.

However, the association added that internet addiction is time-consuming and can lead to empty lives as meaningful interactions are replaced by superficial interactions.

More worryingly, Mr Kelly added: "Studies have shown that people with high usage of social media sites may have lower levels of self-esteem and have a higher incidence of depression."

The IACP advises that internet users who are concerned about the amount of time that they spend online assess whether or not they have an addiction problem.

"These are similar for tackling any addiction and involve changing your environment and creating boundaries and alternatives in relation to your internet usage," Mr Kelly said.

He added that it would be helpful to tell friends and family about a planned 'digital detox'.

The IACP also pointed out that Facebook users should use the 'Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale' to determine whether they suffer from an addiction to the social media platform.

This scale was developed by researchers in Norway to assess whether a Facebook user is addicted to using the platform and is assessed according to the following criteria:

- You spend a lot of time thinking of Facebook.
- You feel the urge to use Facebook more and more.
- You use Facebook to forget about personal problems.
- You have tried to cut down on the use of Facebook without success.
- You become restless or troubled when you cannot use Facebook or use is prohibited.
- You use Facebook so much that it has had a negative impact on your job or studies.

“As with all addictions, coming to terms with an internet addiction can be very challenging, but counselling and psychotherapy can help. It’s best to become aware of any potential addiction and take action to stop it before it takes hold,” Mr Kelly added.

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About the IACP:

Established in 1981, the IACP identifies, develops and maintains professional standards of excellence in counselling and psychotherapy through education, training and accreditation. In promoting best practice and the professional development of its members, IACP holds at its core the protection of the public. Representing both the interests of clients and practitioners (over 3,500 nationwide), IACP provides a telephone referral helpline, an information service; and an online counsellor / psychotherapist / supervisor directory. IACP is a registered Charity (CHY 6615).

More information is available from the IACP’s website www.iacp.ie.