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Release: 17,000 Leaving Students Stressed Out, Say Counsellors

With the Leaving Certificate getting under way over the coming weeks, the country's largest counselling and psychotherapy organisation has said that almost one-third of the 50,000 students, or nearly 17,000 people, suffer from stress during exam time, but very few will seek help.

The Irish Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP), which represents almost 4,000 fully accredited counsellors and psychotherapists across Ireland, has advised stressed out students to reach out to their families, friends and professionals for help.

The IACP said its own independent research showed that only one in seventeen (or 6%) of Irish people under the age of 24 would seek professional help from a doctor or counsellor when experiencing personal problems or difficulties.

Furthermore, only one in 14 (or 7%) of under-24s responded to say that they would not tell anyone about their personal problems.

“Our findings show that there is a real, urgent need for students who are under pressure to talk about their problems, especially during the run up to exams. Unfortunately, the survey shows that there is a reluctance among young people to talk about or discuss their problems or anxieties.

“It also appears from our research that young people who tend to suffer from anxiety are also the ones who are most affected during exam times. This pressure can bring underlying mental health issues to the surface,” said Shane Kelly, spokesman with the IACP.

The organisation has strongly advised students not to suffer in silence if they experience stress while they are preparing for exams.

The IACP said that these anxieties had been especially noticeable in recent years due to the recession and increased emigration, with many young people experiencing uncertainty about the future.

Mr Kelly advised students not to suffer in silence and urged parents to talk to students about their fears. Apart from parental support, the IACP also said that stressed-out students should reach out to friends, family members –especially a sibling or a cousin who has already done their Leaving Cert – as well as teachers, doctors or counsellors.

“It's important for students who are doing exams to stay calm and think positively. However, if they feel that they cannot cope, they should seek professional advice,” Mr Kelly added.

The IACP also advised students to set realistic, attainable goals as opposed to impossible tasks that would put them under further pressure.

Students should also have a well-balanced diet as healthy eating improves memory and concentration, the IACP added. They should also do exercise, which will help to relieve stress and help students to think more clearly and to try to get eight hours' sleep every night, with an hour of relaxation each night.

“Despite being under pressure, it is also important to enjoy this time. Exam time is stressful, but student life is still a relatively carefree existence,” Mr Kelly added.

To find out more about the IACP or to find a list of accredited counsellors or psychotherapists in your area, please visit www.iacp.ie.

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