

Press Release

Counsellors See Rise in Internet and Social Media Addiction

Thursday, 19th July 2012: Social media is even more addictive than cigarettes and alcohol according to a recent study¹. A leading Irish counsellor has warned of the dangers.

“More and more people are gradually losing control over the time they spend online – whether via smartphone, tablet or PC,” said Eoin Stephens, a counsellor and psychotherapist who is a member of the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP).

“While being connected to friends and business associates has obvious benefits, many people, especially young people, are finding their desire to use Facebook or other social media sites is so strong that it’s affecting their personal relationships, their studies and often their jobs too,” said Stephens.

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

What are the signs that you are addicted? Are you guilty of checking your Facebook account before you even get out of bed in the morning? Researchers in Norway have developed the ‘Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale’ which rates the following addictive behaviours:

- 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.

Desires for social media are difficult to control because of the easy-access availability of it, and because giving in to these social urges seems far less harmful than giving in to drugs or nicotine.

“As well as being very time-consuming, internet addiction can lead to very sterile lives. Meaningful interactions with other people are replaced by superficial ones,” said Stephens. “Studies have shown that people with high usage of social media sites tend to have lower levels of self-esteem and have a higher incidence of depression.”

“There are a couple of steps people can take to tackle addiction,” said Stephens. “These are similar for tackling any addiction and involve changing your environment, creating boundaries and alternatives, and telling friends and family about your plans to stop. It is challenging and counselling can help,” he advised.

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

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About 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).

ⁱ Led by Wilhelm Hofmann, a team from Chicago University's Booth Business School conducted an experiment using BlackBerry devices to test the will power of 205 people between the ages of 18 and 85 in the German city of Wurtzburg.