

# We still haven't switched on to electricity savings

MOST householders are not taking advantage of the big savings they can make in electricity bills, a new survey indicates.

Just 6% are getting discounts of more than 10%, even though cuts as high as almost a third of their annual bill are out there.

Over 9,000 households were surveyed by One Big Switch as part of its Big Cost of Living Switch campaign, in the wake of three of Ireland's biggest energy and gas providers announcing price rises.

The survey found that two out of three households are not receiving an electricity discount or do not know if they are. Only 10% have used a price

By **Faye White**

comparison site. David Liston, director of the campaigns in One Big Switch, said: 'Deregulated utilities markets are great for consumers but only when they actively engage with them.'

'The fact that two in three households aren't receiving a discount, or aren't even sure they are, is quite disappointing, especially considering there are big discounts available. If people don't trust themselves to compare prices easily. There are many options out there.'

'There are comparison sites and there are campaigns like the Big Cost of Living Switch.'

Both SSE Airtricity and Bord Gáis Energy said they will be raising rates in November, and Electric Ireland's rates will rise in February.

Adding to price pressure is a rise in the Public Service Obligation levy on electricity bills, which provides for the support of renewable energy.

Households using Electric Ireland will be charged 4% more from February, which works out as an extra €2.91 a month, or €34.92 per year, for the average home.

For Bord Gáis, the new prices will come into effect on November 1 and will cost an extra €82.68 in a year. SSE Airtricity prices will go up €47 a year.

## Dr Mark Dooley



### MORAL MATTERS

# A moment at the school that broke my heart

**L**AST week, I saw something that broke my heart. A parent had just collected her little boy from preschool and, as they strolled along, they held hands. Lovely, I thought to myself, until I saw that in her other hand she held a mobile phone.

Nothing wrong with that, you might say. Don't we all clutch our mobiles as we go about our business? True, but in this case the woman was glued to her screen.

The little boy trailed behind his mother with his head bowed low. She gazed smiling at her screen, walking as though on autopilot. They had been separated for the morning and yet she had nothing to say to her child.

Now, we are all guilty of favouring our phones over other people. The phone sounds and, no matter what the circumstance, we can't resist the temptation to have a peek. It is impolite but, because everybody seems to do it, we no longer take offence.

It is, however, quite another thing to opt for a screen chat while walking with a child.

When they emerge from school, children are bursting with excitement and news.

Indeed, you often get vital information about their lives in those precious minutes.

The little boy was in the world but his mother was far from it. Something was making her smile but it wasn't his story about how Stephen spilled paint over Jane's new dress. It wasn't how Max sneakily pinched Louise during her precocious display of Irish dancing.

I am a hands-on father of three young boys and I know only too well the pressures of parenthood. But surely the texts and chats can wait until the little ones have settled back home? Surely nothing takes priority over them and their tender lives?

As is always the case, you see something once and then you see it everywhere.

Later that same day, I noticed two more parents dragging along their sons and daughters while staring at the phone screen. Now, I notice it every day.

It breaks my heart because of the damage this could do to children.

Our world is becoming more frightening by the day. In these modern times, children are routinely exposed to pressures and

dangers that seek only to rob them of their innocence.

Never have they required so much parental attention and care. And yet, thanks to technology, the attention they need is very often lacking. It takes effort to keep on top of their lives, but that is a small price to pay.

The little boy walked along looking at the ground. His path was littered with conkers and the first batch of crimson leaves. The dew-covered grass glistened in the low autumn sun.

Nature is never more beautiful than in death. If ever there were a time for children to reconnect with the world, it is now – in this season of sunlight and shadows, of colours so spectacularly vibrant.

It is as though the world is pleading with us: 'Come, discover me, before I lie down and die.'

The little boy had so much to see, so much to learn about the world. But he also had plenty to teach. My children never cease to amaze me when we are out walking together.

**I**BEGIN to explain something about an aspect of nature when, to my embarrassment, I suddenly realise I know very little. My superficial lecture on wildlife or the landscape is nothing compared with the insights of my three tutors in life. I will say it again: I have learned more from my children than I have from any other source.

But to learn from them, we must be prepared to listen and pay attention. We must never squander an opportunity to see the world through their eyes.

'So, how was school today?' is a simple question that has the potential to change a parent's entire perspective.

There are many eminent people, including astrophysicist Stephen Hawking, who believe that artificial intelligence poses an 'existential threat' to humankind.

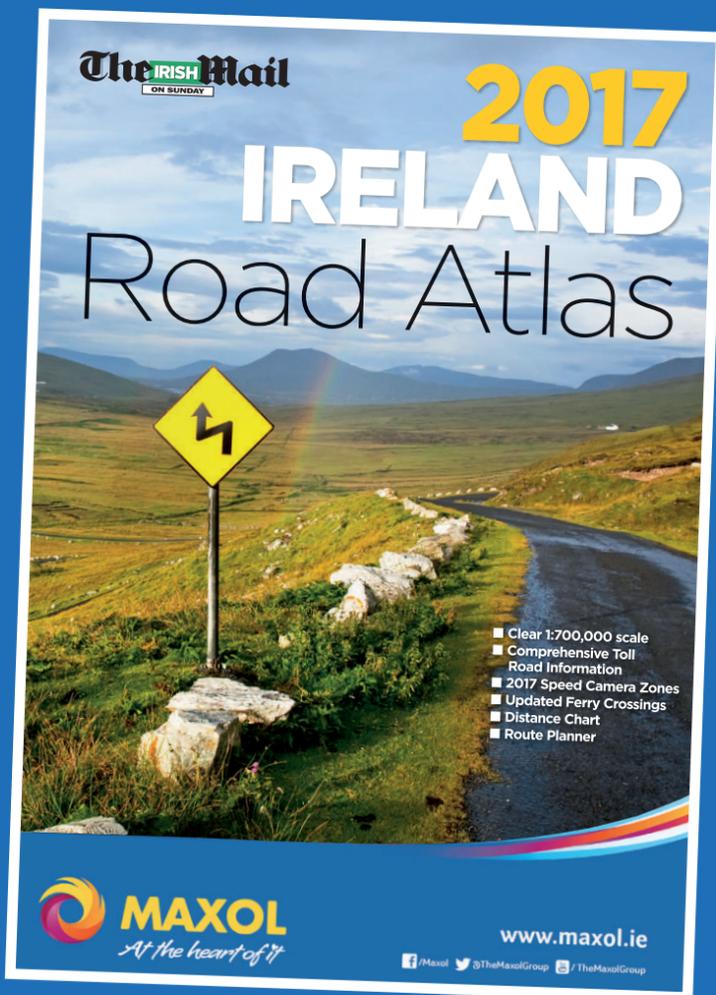
What they fear is that, one day, we may become subservient to the intelligent machines we have created.

My fear is that something like this is already happening – that the very way we relate to each other is being transformed by the machines to which we cling so tightly. My fear is that we are slowly losing touch with the only source of love and life we possess.

One little boy stared vacantly at the ground as his mother smiled at a machine. The machine did not smile back.

—mark.dooley@daily@mail.ie—

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# The IRISH Mail

ON SUNDAY