News Release

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**‘DITCH THE CHRISTMAS LIST’**

 **SAYS MOTHERS’ UNION**

As we enter the most commercialised time of the year, with family finances under pressure, Mothers’ Union is calling on parents to ditch the Christmas list for their children, as it launches Labelled for Life, its new guide on how to deal with the commercial influences on family life.

To mark the launch, Mothers’ Union commissioned a survey into Christmas pressures on parents which shows that 72% of parents have bought their children a gift that was on their Christmas list which they really couldn’t afford. An identical number (72%) of parents have worried about receiving their bank and credit card statements in January. In addition, 46% of parents have taken out a loan, or got themselves into financial difficulty to give the family a good Christmas.

Many parents (36%) also feel pressured at Christmas into buying presents which they believe to be inappropriate to the age of their children, with 59% agreeing that they have bought their child a gift from their Christmas list which was unsuitable for them. This pressure is particularly marked in larger families: 68% of parents with more than three children have bought their child a gift that was on their Christmas list that they didn’t think was suitable for their age group, compared to 55% of parents with one child.

“The pressure this brings to bear on family relationships and happiness is enormous” said Reg Bailey, chief executive of Mothers’ Union, “Our survey shows that Christmas is the time of year when parents feel most pressurised into buying their children gifts which are over their budget, or inappropriate to their age. We want to ensure parents have the confidence to manage Christmas without debt or the stress of disappointing their children. The majority of parents we spoke to (69%) said that Christmas lists create disappointment for children if they do not receive all the gifts that they have asked for.

We wouldn’t want to spoil the traditions of Christmas, but we are asking parents to consider ditching the Christmas list specifically to help reduce this sense of disappointment at what should be a time of happiness for all the family. Our new Labelled for Life guide aims to give parents the confidence they need to handle issues around the commercialisation they face as a family”

**Size Matters**

Size seems to matter in the quest to give the kids a good Christmas: 84% of parents have bought their children extra Christmas presents at the last minute because they didn’t think the pile looked big enough.

**Pressure from All Sides**

“Our findings show that an overwhelming 89% of parents believe that Christmas is too commercialised, and 83% feel that for most children in the UK, Christmas is about the joy of receiving rather than the joy of giving. Our role, as Mothers’ Union, is to speak up for parents asking for industry and government to hear their concerns, and to help support and equip families to help them manage the commercial pressures they face, particularly in these economically difficult times.” **About Labelled for Life**

Labelled for Life is the latest tool in the Mothers’ Union’s Bye Buy Childhood Campaign, which aims to empower families to challenge the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood through positive action. The guide explains how marketing is aimed at children, gives practical ways to manage commercial influences on the family, outlines codes and regulations governing marketing to children and offers suggestions on taking further action to end commercialisation of childhood. It is available from the Mothers’ Union at a cost of £2 and is non profit making. To obtain a copy call 020 7222 5533, or email mu@themothersunion.org

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**Mothers’ Union spokespersons Reg Bailey, Chief Executive and Rachel Aston, Social Policy Officer and compiler of Labelled for Life, are available for interview.**

**Note to editors:**

The survey was carried out by ComRes, who interviewed 1,110 parents with children under the age of 18 online from 17th to 21st October 2012.

**Additional Survey information of relevance to journalists**

The larger the family, the greater the potential dissatisfaction with your Christmas lot: 47% of parents with more than three kids feel their children compare gifts and are upset if they feel they have done worse, compared with 39% of families with two children who notice this.

 The survey shows parents feel pressure from many sources:
- 82% think the media exerts too much pressure to give the perfect Christmas
- 53% of parents feel their kids are pressured by friends to ask for expensive gifts
- 44% of parents feel pressured by the kids to buy gifts they can’t afford and 36% feel pressured by other parents to do this
- 69% of parents feel that parents spend more money on their children when they feel guilty about not spending enough time with them during the year.

**Dads Are a Soft Touch**

Dads appear to succumb to greater pressure than mums at Christmas: 41% of dads feel pressured by their kids to buy age inappropriate gifts, compared to 32% of mums who do this. Dads also seem more sensitive to disappointment: 43% of dads feel their kids compare gifts and are upset if they have ‘done worse’, while only 35% of mums feel aware of this.

**Labelled for Life has received the following endorsements**

**Archbishop of Canterbury**

‘There’s a steady pressure on us as parents to buy things for our children. It’s a pressure that comes from our children and it often reflects the sheer volume of marketing that they are exposed to on a daily basis. The Mothers’ Union’s Labelled for Life booklet is a valuable reminder that part of our responsibility as parents and carers is to help our children learn to navigate the pressure of the modern world, and that developing a critical response to commercial pressures will help give our children the freedom they need to grow.’

**Dr Linda Papadopoulos**

I think (Labelled for Life) is a very well written, useful resource that not only explains how marketing is aimed at kids, but importantly, outlines practical ideas on managing the effects of this. The section on codes and regulations is particularly useful as this is an area that can cause a lot of confusion when parents want to raise an issue with marketeers and /or regulators.  I really enjoyed reading it and welcome it both as a psychologist and a mother.

**Helen Goodman**

**Member of Parliament for Bishop Auckland and Shadow Minister for Culture, Media and Sport**

‘I first started getting worried about pester power and the pressure advertises put on children in 1998. It was in the run up to Christmas and my son was 7 years old. The world just seemed full of people wanting to make money out of him, which I did not like at all. The pressure are obviously worse in the middle of a recession when many families are feeling squeezed, so Labelled for Life a guide from Mothers’ Union is very timely. It sets out practical tips like looking at alternative ways of spending money with your child. ...’

The Labelled for Life survey was conducted by ComRes who interviewed 1,110 parents with children under the age of 18 online from 17-21 October 2012. Data were weighted to be demographically representative of all British adults aged 18+. ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.

**Further endorsements available on request from Dr John Sentamu, Archbishop of York, Vicki Shotbolt, CEO The Parent Zone (Vodaphone) and Kathryn Davies – Proctor & Gamble**

**Parent Case Studies are also available:**

**Rachel Veldtman, teacher and mother of two from Brockley**

‘I definitely relate to the Labelled for Life survey finding that parents rush out and get last minute Christmas presents because the pile isn’t big enough. I think we all do it to out of a desire to make the kids feel loved and treasured. As a family we set a budget for presents and we wouldn’t overspend or go into debt. There is no sense of satisfaction these days. Kids today are living with a lack of lack and they don’t enjoy what they already have.’

**Viola Kerr, mother of three from Oxford:**

‘I don’t like the idea of Christmas lists; it all feels a bit unpleasant and tasteless, especially when adults pass on their requests. I think we should nip lists in the bud when kids reach the teenage years. We set a budget for the children’s Christmas presents, giving say one big present of around £50.’

**Kate Buckley, age 37 from Purley, Artist and mother of three:**

‘We manage our children’s expectations on Christmas presents; they write down two or three presents they’d like and may get one of these. We tell them it is a letter not a list and that they mustn’t be too greedy. For us, the whole celebration of Christmas is the key thing. I’d rather decorate the house than receive gifts.’

**About the Mother’s Union**

The Mothers' Union is a Christian international family charity with over 4 million members dedicated to promoting marriage and family life. It realises that the wellbeing of the family cannot be separated from the welfare of wider communities and therefore undertakes groundbreaking community work in over 83 countries.

Bye Buy Childhood: A campaign into addressing the issues around the commercialisation and sexualisation of children, was launched by Mothers’ Union in September 2010 with their report of the same name. In December 2010 Reg Bailey was invited by Government to head up an independent inquiry into the commercialisation and sexualisation of children. His report, *Letting Children be Children* was published in June 2011 and made 14 recommendations to Government. A review of progress on these recommendations is due later this year.

For more information about Mothers’ Union, see [www.themothersunion.org](http://www.themothersunion.org) and [www.byebuychildhood.org](http://www.byebuychildhood.org)