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America's Secret in Plain Sight

The American Institute on Domestic Violence reports that the stress of economic hard times has increased the incidence of domestic violence across the nation. The Institute reports that 5.3 million women have been abused in the past year and 1,232 women have been killed by a spouse or intimate partner. The problem spills into the workplace as well where 18,700 incidents of violence were committed by a current or former spouse, partner or boyfriend. Another grim statistic was recently released by Liz Claiborne, Inc. which found that 44% of teens in families with economic problems had seen their parents abusing each other and 67% of these same teens reported some sort of violence or abuse in their own relationships.

Vera House, Inc. www.verahouse.org an organization based in Syracuse, NY provides crisis and educational services in response to domestic violence and offers the following insights based on actual case histories of women they've assisted:

- **Controlling someone** is not merely a precursor to abuse; it *is* abuse and must be addressed before it escalates to physical violence. If someone prevents a partner from seeing certain people, belittles her in public, controls her finances, tells her what to wear and when to be home – that's abuse.
- **Intense jealousy** is a classic sign of control – a way to make someone a *possession* of the other person.
- **Choking someone** is as much an act of physical violence as punching someone.
- **The most dangerous time** in an abusive relationship is the six months after one partner says she's leaving. The victim should not return home after leaving unless she has a police escort.

Victims often become invested in hiding the frightening reality of their abuse. Linda Neely was such a person. To her friends she was the epitome of gentleness and joy, a delight to be near. But at home she lived in fear and a constant state of vigilance to protect herself and her family. On October 21st, 2006, Linda was stabbed in the heart by her husband, who is now serving 25 years to life in a state prison. Following her death, a log was found documenting the many nights that she and her children fled their home to find safety. The family of Linda Neely now maintains a Website www.lindaslessons.org which is packed with links to valuable resources and also contains actual lesson plans for educating students in grades 7 through 12 about domestic violence.

According to the American Institute on Domestic Violence, the workplace is affected as well with 94% of corporate security directors ranking domestic violence as a high security risk while 78% of human resource directors rank domestic violence as a substantial employee problem.

If you wish to discuss your personal situation, your EAP is a good place to start. Or, you may wish to contact the national domestic violence hotline at 1-800-799 SAFE (7233) to identify resources in your area. ***However, if you are in imminent danger, dial 911 immediately for assistance.***