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Breaking the Silence: Children's Stories
New PBS Documentary Reveals Surprising Information about Child Abuse and the Shocking Inadequacies of Family Courts across the Country

Premieres Thursday, October 20 at 10 pm ET on most PBS stations (check local listings)

(Hartford, CT) – It is no secret that domestic violence has devastating, long-term effects on children. For the past two decades, the evidence has been mounting in psychological studies and academic journals. What is lesser known is that many domestic batterers are successfully using custody and visitation litigation to abuse their families further.

Breaking the Silence: Children's Stories — premiering Thursday, October 20 at 10 pm ET on most PBS stations (check local listings) — is a powerful new PBS documentary that chronicles the impact of domestic violence on children and the recurring failings of family courts across the country to protect them from their abusers. In stark and often poignant interviews, children and battered mothers tell their stories of abuse at home and continued trauma within the courts. Co-produced by Tatge-Lasseur Productions and Connecticut Public Television (CPTV), this one-hour special also features interviews with domestic violence experts, attorneys and judges who reveal the disturbing frequency in which abusers are winning custody of their children and why these miscarriages of justice continue to occur.

This program is made possible by funding from the Mary Kay Ash Charitable Foundation.

One of the most effective ways an abusive father can inflict pain and declare his domination is to take custody of his children away from their mother. As Joan Meier, an attorney and professor of clinical law, explains, “To win custody of the kids over and against the mother’s will is the ultimate victory...short of killing the kids.” While there may be a perception in society that the family court system has a maternal preference, statistics show that, in the past twenty years, fathers are more often being awarded custody. Furthermore, in family court cases where mothers allege battery, fathers are given custody two-thirds of the time.

Breaking the Silence: Children's Stories also explores a controversial theory called Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS), which has been used in countless cases by abusive fathers to gain custody of their children. The theory states that the custodial parent (most often the mother) is alienating the child against the father by raising false allegations against him. Despite being discredited by the American Psychological Association and similar organizations, PAS continues to be used in family courts as a defense for why a child is rejecting the father.

The documentary profiles several shocking stories of abuse further complicated by the courts, including the story of Karen and her three children. Karen’s suspicions of her husband’s sexually abusive behavior were confirmed through a medical exam. However, when the custody case came to trial, a court-appointed psychologist, or evaluator, testified that Karen was using Parental Alienation Syndrome to turn her children against their father. The psychologist never read the medical and police reports of the case and never interviewed the children. All three children were awarded custody to their dad.

Karen’s son Jeff, who left his father’s custody when he turned eighteen, now serves as an advocate for children in similar abusive situations as a member of the Courageous Kids Network. His two younger sisters still live with their father.

Breaking the Silence: Children's Stories also features interviews with New York Yankees Manager Joe Torre, who dealt with domestic violence as a child, and in 2003, started the Safe-at-Home Foundation to help educate people about the issue; and Walter Anderson, Chairman and CEO of *Parade* magazine, who recounts the emotional and physical abuse he suffered at the hands of his alcoholic father.

Breaking the Silence: Children's Stories is a follow-up to the acclaimed 2001 PBS documentary, *Breaking the Silence: Journeys of Hope*, which focused on women and domestic abuse. “*Journeys of Hope* documented how much we, as a society, made progress to combat domestic violence and serve its victims,” explains producer Dominique Lasseur. “*Children Stories* reminds us that a lot needs to be done to better protect our children from the long term effects of living with violent abusers.” Both documentaries were funded by the Mary Kay Ash Charitable Foundation,

Co-Producers:



Underwriter:



National Distribution:



Breaking the Silence: Children's Stories is made possible by the generous support of the Mary Kay Ash Charitable Foundation. Started in 1996, the mission of the foundation is two-fold: eliminating cancers affecting women by supporting top medical scientists who are searching for a cure for breast, uterine, cervical and ovarian cancers; and ending the epidemic of violence against women by providing grants to women's shelters and supporting community outreach programs. The Foundation wholeheartedly supports education and awareness on the issue of domestic violence.

Breaking the Silence: Children's Stories is co-produced by Tatge/Lasseur Productions, and its principals, Catherine Tatge and Dominique Lasseur. Tatge/Lasseur have a long and successful history of producing programs for PBS, including *The Question of God: C.S. Lewis & Sigmund Freud*, *Dances of Life*, *Holo Mai Pele*, *CeCe Winans: A Gospel Celebration* and *Breaking the Silence: Journeys of Hope*. Tatge/Lasseur have had close association with Bill Moyers on several projects. With Moyers, they co-produced *Genesis: A Living Conversation* and *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*, the latter of which earned Tatge an Emmy Award.

The documentary is co-produced by Connecticut Public Television (CPTV), a nationally recognized producer and presenter of quality public television programming, including *Barney & Friends*[™], *Alan Alda in Scientific American Frontiers*, *Bob the Builder*[™], and *Wounded in Action*. Entering its 43rd year, CPTV remains committed to bringing the best in educational programming and services to Connecticut and the nation.

Co-Producers: Tatge/Lasseur Productions and Connecticut Public Television.

Underwriter: The Mary Kay Ash Charitable Foundation.

Producer: Dominique Lasseur.

Director: Catherine Tatge.

Executive-in-Charge (CPTV): Larry Rifkin.

Format: Closed captioned

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