

You Chose Option A...

The last time you spoke with your older sister it was to congratulate her for the birth of her second child. You had to call several times to reach her and when you finally did, the detachment in her voice was painful. When you call this time, you first ask her how her son is doing. After she gives a quick response, you burst in tears telling her that you're scared of Alex and don't know what to do.

"You thought you could just run away from home and marry prince charming, huh? Well this is what you get. Being married isn't easy, Isabella. We all go through rough times. You should have thought this through more before leaving. What do you expect us to do for you when you're thousands of miles away? Stop being so lazy and make your husband dinner."

Your sister didn't let you say much before hanging up. Feeling more alone than ever, you get up from the phone to start making tonight's dinner. A few hours later, you get a call from your aunt who lives in Florida. Before you can even greet her, she tells you that your sister called and told her about your situation and she's concerned that it will only get worse. She shares a story from her first marriage, where emotional abuse turned to extreme physical abuse, and about the time she ended up in the hospital with life threatening injuries. *"I don't want you to go through what I did, mija,"* she says affectionately before offering you a place to stay at her house until you can find a job and get a place of your own. She says she'll hire a lawyer for you who can help you keep your residency. You're scared - everything is happening so fast, but you think it would be for the best after hearing what happened to your aunt. You agree to go, and she tells you to pack a bag and hide it somewhere while she makes arrangements and calls you tomorrow.



A Follow Up from Emerge:

Immigrant women experiencing domestic abuse often face some of the most complex barriers to getting help. Newly arrived immigrants must learn a new language, set of laws, customs, expectations, value systems and general ways of life, like the bus system that Isabella had trouble navigating. It can take years to become familiar with the resources available in their new location, so they may not understand what help is available to them if they find themselves in an abusive relationship.

Being alone in Arizona with a support system made it more difficult for Isabella to navigate getting help. Support systems may consist of family, friends or coworkers -- all of whom may provide emotional support, a safe place to live or financial resources. Often, lack of this support is a serious barrier that can make leaving an abusive relationship very challenging for survivors. Isabella was lucky to have her aunt reach out to her, as many survivors are completely isolated and don't have access to financial resources.

Many immigrants who are in the country without proper documentation also fear asking law enforcement for help when they're in crisis because the fear of being deported outweighs what they are experiencing.

A common abuse tactic is to use legal status to maintain control over someone. In Isabella's case, she came to the states legally but Alex purposefully let her visa expire. Immigrant survivors may also experience:

- having their important papers hidden from them or destroyed,
- threats that the police will deport them if they report the abuse,
- fear of losing children through the court system if their partner has status in the United States,
- being isolated from others who may speak the same language (which takes away any chance of having a support system)

Thanks to the Violence Against Women Act, there are some legal remedies available to survivors of domestic abuse who are immigrants. The key is that immigrants have to know that help may be available to them, which is why Emerge! works to connect people to resources that can help them navigate and fully take advantage of their rights.

[Click here to see what would have happened if you would have chosen to make plans for getting back to Argentina](#)