

Picture Story Four: What Should She Do?

[View the picture story.](#)



Health literacy issue:

- domestic violence

IMPORTANT: "What Should She Do?" should be used with discretion, as its topic of domestic violence may evoke strong reactions and discomfort, especially if a class member has experienced domestic violence personally or knows someone who has.

It is the author's experience that students who feel comfortable in a class sometimes ask their teacher for information about the rights of domestic violence victims in the U.S. as well as services that can provide refuge from abuse. Such students may indicate that they know a friend of a friend who is in an abusive situation. The picture story can be a safe catalyst for discussion of the law and dissemination of accurate information on services for victims.

The timeline: Times of events are shown in the story simply to indicate the passage of time for a learner to follow. They do not indicate a standard timeline of a domestic violence situation. Each situation in real life is different, and events should not be discounted as domestic violence because they are far apart or intense periods of violence are followed by fewer episodes.

The basic story:

A woman and man fall in love. They live peacefully together and start a family. One day, the man drinks too much. He gets angry and hits the woman. The woman has a black eye. The children see what happens and become upset. Later the man apologizes to the woman, tells her he loves her and gives her flowers. She is confused, but she hopes things will be better. The man drinks again, and he beats the woman again. Now the woman is very confused. She doesn't know if she should stay with the man, who says he loves her, but keeps getting drunk and beating her. She doesn't know what she should do to protect her children. She thinks about calling 911, but she isn't sure what will happen if she does.

Background information:

- Evidence shows that "there are large numbers of immigrant women trapped and isolated in violent relationships" in the United States. (Family Violence Prevention Fund website, <http://endabuse.org/programs/immigrant/> , 1999, as cited in the ERIC Digest "[Trauma and the English Language Learner](#)" by Janet Isserlis, http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/trauma2.html.)
- Immigrants are frequently unaware that victims of abuse have legal rights in the U.S. They are also often unaware of the existence of shelters. Teachers are encouraged to find phone numbers and procedural information for shelters to provide to students in conjunction with picture story activities. Victims need a realistic idea of what they will encounter if they try to leave an abuser with the assistance of public services.
- Immigrant and refugee victims of abuse are threatened by abusers with loss of child custody and immigration status.
- Children are strongly affected by observing domestic violence. Some may become violent themselves as a result, while others withdraw or act out in other ways. For more information on this topic, see <http://www.ndvh.org/>, website of the National Domestic Violence Hotline.

- October has been designated domestic violence awareness month, which provides an impersonal opportunity to bring up the issue for educational purposes.

Suggested questions for prompting discussion while eliciting the story:

- First frame: Who are the people in the picture? How are they feeling? What are they thinking?
- Second frame: When is the picture happening? Who is in the picture now? What is new in the picture? How is the family feeling?
- Third frame: Now what day is it? Who is in the picture? What is he doing?
- Fourth frame: Now what day is it? Who is in the picture? What is the man doing? Why do you think he is hitting the woman? What is the woman doing? (Note: the alcohol is a prop in the story to illustrate a possible progression of events; however, you may want to clarify to students that domestic violence occurs without substance abuse as a precursor.)
- Fifth frame: Now what do you see? What are the mother and children doing? Why is the mother crying? Why are the children crying?
- Sixth frame: Now what day is it? What is the man doing? What do you think he is saying? What is the woman thinking?
- Seventh frame: Now what day is it? What is happening in this picture?
- Eighth frame: How is the woman? (upset, confused). She is thinking about many things. What is she thinking about? (calling police, effect on kids, alcohol problem, man says he loves her and won't do it again, etc.)

With the eighth frame the opportunity arises for particularly valuable discussion on the problems a victim of abuse faces and sources of help available in the community.

- What happens in your country in this kind of situation? Is it the same or different from the United States?
- What are the problems for the children? (trauma of seeing their mother attacked, possibility of become victims themselves, neglect by parents, etc.)
- What do you think the woman will do? Why? If they answer "stay," maybe it's for reasons of loving husband, wanting to keep the family together, embarrassed that community will find out, or fear of having to support kids alone, financially and emotionally.
- What do you think the woman should do? Why?
- What can happen if she calls 911? (maybe positive outcome of protective order and placement in shelter; or negative outcome of police don't believe her, children removed from home, etc. Students may come up with some bleak outcomes from situations they have heard about. It is important that the teacher knows in advance what local police and social service resources are available to victims so that students know what hope and help there is for victims. Maybe a local police officer or a social worker who specializes in domestic violence cases would speak to your class.)
- What can she do if she lives in your community? (This gives you the opportunity to provide accurate information for your community.)