



By Pieter van Zyl

they can realise their dreams. Teach them to make choices but within boundaries you've set to protect them.

"A child who experiences love and emotional safety at home can do anything and will have no fear," Tessa says.

Give your child the space to talk about his fears and show his emotions, Tumi adds. "When our car was stolen we allowed Katlego to repeat the story over and over to everyone so he could get it out of his system." Create a network of reliable adults your child can talk to or phone when he's afraid – family, neighbours and friends' parents.

MAKE SAFETY PLANS TOGETHER

If your child says he feels unsafe ask what exactly makes him feel that way, Dennis Vusani says. Dennis is a social worker at the Nonceba Family Counselling Centre for abused children in Khayelitsha.

"Discuss the fears, work through possible scenarios together and arm him with tips on what to do in specific situations."

For example talk about what he should do if a bully pushes him around and threat-

ens him. How should he react if a strange man tries to entice him into his car?

What if there's an armed robbery in a shopping centre? What are other parents and guardians teaching their children?

Teach your children practical rules such as staying in one place if they are lost in a shopping centre or staying in a lift if the doors close while they're inside and you're stuck outside the lift. Point out security guards to them so they know what they look like in case they need help.

SHOW A SAFE WORLD

It's important to show your child there are places that are safe and where you can have fun. Find out about safe parks or beaches where children can play.

TEACH YOUR CHILD SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality makes you strong. It doesn't matter what your religion is; it's important children are told God is in control even though He sometimes allows bad things to happen to good people.

IF A CHILD HAS HAD A TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE

Trauma doesn't necessarily have a bad long-

term effect, says Tessa.

"It depends on how we rebuild our lives and how we use the pain to redirect our lives in a positive way."

Use the trauma as an opportunity to talk to your child about ways of dealing with his fears. Give the child skills for dealing with the pain.

Children often don't have the vocabulary to express their emotions which is why it's necessary to get professional advice. You don't always have to pay for it either; you can approach a support group such as Sadag.

"A traumatic childhood in SA doesn't have to lead to a problematic adulthood," says Dr William Beardslee of the Preventive Intervention Project at Harvard University's Judge Baker Children's Centre.

"Every child has the resilience to cope with difficult circumstances. It's the parents' job to unlock that self-confidence in their children."

* Phone Sadag on 0860-103-645, 011-783-1474 or visit www.sadag.co.za.

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EXTRA SOURCES: WWW.WOMEN24.COM, PSYCHOLOGIES.MAGAZINE

HOW THIS YOUNG VICTIM WAS HELPED

Early last year Thomas*, an 11-year-old Pretoria boy, woke up when someone tried to break into his parents' home. He woke his parents in time to scare the thieves away. He was a hero and had possibly saved the lives of his family.

But two months later he still couldn't fall asleep when he was alone. His greatest fear was that his parents would be killed and he'd have to survive alone.

His parents took him to a therapist.

This is how she treated him.

*** RETURN TO THE INCIDENT**

"In the safety of a therapy session Thomas had to return emotionally to what happened that night and confront it," the therapist says. "He had to tell the story in a safe environment."

*** USE YOUR BRAIN**

When you experience a trauma or think about it your right brain – which is connected with emotions – dominates. In therapy you learn to use your logical left brain to understand and process these emotions.

Thomas had to use his imagination to give a face to the person who tried to break in because he hadn't seen him. By drawing a face on a tennis ball he was able to give

a more tangible form to the shadowy figure. Every time he was afraid of or angry with the intruder he could take out his frustrations on the ball by throwing it against a wall.

*** FORGIVE**

Another step on the road to recovery was trying to understand the concept of forgiveness. Forgiving means setting yourself free from the control the event has over your life. It's a process a child must be guided through.

*** LOOKING AHEAD**

"We ended the treatment with concrete plans for the future," the therapist says. What were Thomas' dreams and attainable goals? When and how did he want to realise them? Thomas could now begin to focus on his own development and growth.

During and after his treatment it was important for his parents to reassure him of their love and protection. Together they came up with a plan of what to do if another intruder tries to break into the house. Thomas now has a cellphone and knows the telephone numbers of the nearest police station as well as all the emergency numbers.

* Not his real name