

Taffy and the Invisible Magic Bandage

Problem(s) Addressed:

A child displaying symptoms consistent with undisclosed trauma and/or abuse.

Appropriate for:

Children 12 and under: particularly effective for very young children. **For a child who has been threatened, this story, in combination with others, seems to be most effective when recorded on audio tape; this allows the child to hear the stories repeatedly. The audio tape can begin with empowering stories such as, "The Hero," "The Boy Who had to Catch a Dragon" and "The Lion in the Hole" using the child's name in these three stories. Make the story appropriate for the child's sex, by changing the story character and pronouns. Then add "Rags/Taffy," and stories such as, "The Little Fox," "The Prickly Burr," "The Burned Tree" and "The Big War."** Let the family know that it doesn't matter if the child seems to be paying attention to the tape; the messages are heard by the wise part of the child, even when he/she is not paying conscious attention. (See "Letter to Parents", Appendix D). When telling this story in therapy, have a large stuffed dog¹ and a large bandage available. At the point in the story where Rags/Taffy gets an invisible magic bandage on his/her mouth, have the child put the bandage on the dog's mouth. When Rags/Taffy pulls the invisible magic bandage off his/her mouth, have the child do the same to the dog.

If this story agitates the child, it can mean that he/she has had an undisclosed traumatic experience. Therefore, have the family play the tape after the child has fallen asleep for several nights. Once the child discloses what is bothering them, the agitation and dislike of the stories usually disappears.

Message:

The power of a child is **to tell the truth** and keep telling the truth about what has been bothering him/her to adults who are powerful and can protect children. (Note description of symbols and metaphors in this story in "Understanding the Use of Therapeutic Stories" in the beginning of this book)

¹ . Puppets are available at a discount to therapists and others in the helping professions working with abused children from Folkmanis Catalog: Sohotoys@aol.com

Symbols and Metaphors:

Nighttime activities (chase bugs, etc.): not afraid of dark

Journey into the deep woods: any period during which the child was traumatized

Invisible magic bandage: any threat or reason that the child is silenced

Disappear: any threat or negative consequence of disclosing a traumatic experience

Thorn: pain of silence

Swim: cope appropriately with feelings

Bandage "hurt" as it was removed: pain and fear that can result when a traumatic experience is disclosed

Elements of the Story That Can be Changed:

The constellation of the family can be changed, the symptoms that the child is having. The people who question the puppy (If a family member is suspected as abusing the child, use "someone" or "teacher" or "friend" instead of family).

Note:

This story was written for a four-year-old boy who appeared to have been threatened by his father not to disclose the abuse which occurred during visitations. The child was read the story and the story was audio taped at the same time. Shortly after leaving that therapy session, he began to disclose the abuse to his mother. She played the story to him many times, as I had recommended, and he continued to disclose very traumatic and extensive sexual and physical abuse. Note that the story does not give specific details which would lead a child to disclose one type of abuse over another. Rags/Taffy has been found to be an effective means to encourage young children to disclose the source of their symptoms.

Symptoms of being traumatized by a variety of experiences can look very similar. It is important to remember that a child can experience an event as very traumatizing when an adult would have little reaction to the same experience. For example, one child disclosed that a classroom bully was calling him "Luke, the Puke" and tearing up his papers in class. The symptoms ceased when this problem was handled.

Disclosure stories give a therapist an addition technique in helping child deal with traumatic experiences.

Taffy and the Invisible Magic Bandage

Once upon a time there was a puppy named Taffy. Taffy lived with her family and loved to play all day long. She wasn't afraid of much at all and everyone said that she was an adventuresome puppy. Taffy often went exploring all around her home, looking under rocks and barking at bugs and spiders. She especially loved the evening when the sun went down, because she could chase lightning bugs and howl at the moon with the other animals of the night.

One day Taffy went on a journey into the deep woods, and when she returned she was different from the old Taffy. She was afraid to go to sleep and afraid to be away from her family. She had nightmares and shook with fear when anyone mentioned the idea of looking under rocks or going out alone at night. She often got stomach aches, and her head hurt a lot, too.

Now her family noticed that Taffy had not been the same since her journey into the deep woods, and they asked the puppy to tell them why she had changed. But Taffy was unable to talk about her journey, because while she was in the woods she had gotten an invisible magic bandage over her mouth and was told that if she removed it, she would disappear. Taffy must have really been afraid that she would disappear, because she left the bandage in place, even though everyone around her kept asking her why she was acting so differently. It especially made Taffy afraid when they asked her questions, because she was sure that if the bandage came off surely she would disappear. When the subject of the deep woods came up she paced and ran around in circles because of all the feelings that she had inside. She turned her back on those who questioned her and felt like she was sick to her stomach.

One day Taffy was stuck by a thorn, and she cried in pain. Her family knew that she had been in the thorn bushes and they asked her where she hurt, but the invisible magic bandage kept her from telling them. Those around her tried guessing: "Is it in your leg?" "Is it in your front paw?" "Is it in your ear?" But no one could find out where the thorn was, and it continued to hurt the puppy more and more. Taffy knew it was in her tail, and she couldn't get it out by herself. Her family finally got very upset with Taffy and told her that she must tell them where the thorn was so that they could help her. But Taffy remained silent. She still had the invisible magic bandage in place and she was more afraid to take it off than she was to keep the thorn in her tail.

One day, one of the other dogs, a mean old mutt named Spot, began to bully Taffy. "I'll bet you don't even know how to swim," he said in a nasty way. "Of all the dogs in the world, you're probably the only one who was ever born who doesn't know what to do in the water. Ha!" On and on went Spot, teasing and poking fun at Taffy, until Taffy began to realize that the old dog was just talking to hear himself talk.

Going to the edge of the water (and more than just a little bit scared), Taffy waded in, moved her paws and her body, and went quickly across the pond. She could swim. The old dog had tried to trick her, but Taffy understood that children can figure out when they are being tricked. Taffy had found out that she did have the power to figure out the difference between a lie and the truth.

After her experience with Spot, Taffy began to wonder about the invisible magic bandage. She began to realize that she had been tricked into thinking that she must never remove it. So Taffy raised her paw to her mouth. Carefully she pulled at it, and it hurt a little as it came off, but Taffy **did not disappear**. With a great feeling of relief at being rid of the bandage, she ran home and told her family about it. Then she told them where the thorn had been stuck in her tail and asked their help in removing it. She'd had the thorn in her tail for so long that it hurt a little as it was being removed, but she felt relief **once it was out**.

Soon after that, Taffy went back to being her old self, chasing after lightning bugs and staying up at night. She found that it was easier to sleep; she stopped having nightmares and wasn't afraid to be alone anymore.

And to make sure that she never got an invisible magic bandage again, Taffy told everyone all about the journey into the deep woods and how afraid she had been to talk about it. **And the more she told the truth the safer and more powerful she felt**, because Taffy had discovered that the invisible magic bandage was not magic at all - it was only there to keep her quiet. Taffy had learned a lesson that she would always remember: talking to trusted adults who protect children about her journey into the deep woods, helped her to feel powerful and secure.

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