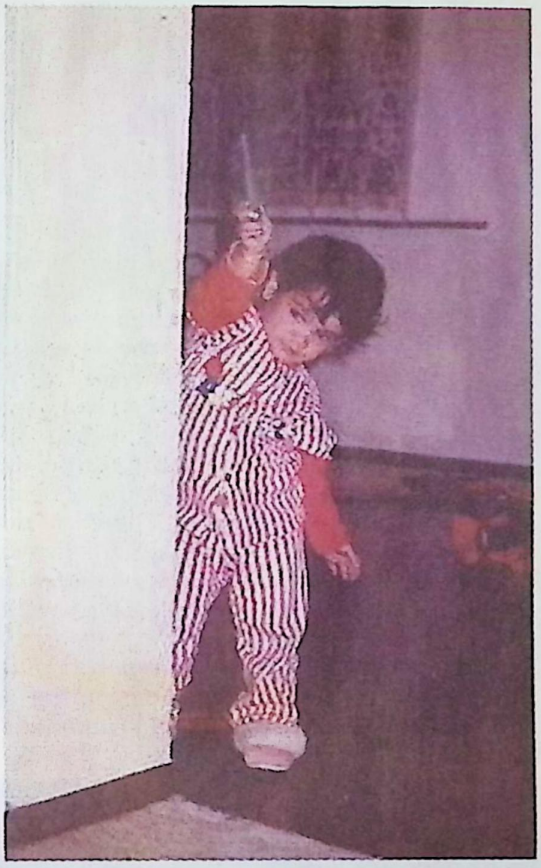
blameless, and not to be feared. But not all children are equally trusting of reassurances from adults...

Another friend of mine had been very worried about the fact that her son, Oliver, was reluctant to swim in the sea. To her great relief, more recently, the four-year-old demonstrated a degree of enthusiasm for swimming pools that went some way to reassuring her that it would all work out (given that he belongs to a family of beach-lovers). However, a few weeks ago, Oliver came to her and requested her to give up the highly enjoyable pastime of lounging by the pool side and reading, in order to accompany him into the pool. When she asked why he needed her to go swimming with him, he said "There are sharks in the pool"!

Despite her best efforts at persuasion, Oliver refused to go back into the pool without his mother. So she spent some time playing with him in the water, in the hope that he would see that there were no sharks. But as soon as she got out of the pool, so did he! In vain did she spend considerable time and energy explaining to him that "sharks don't live in swimming pools, they live in the big sea". "I believe you, Mummy" replied Oliver (clearly not believing a word of this) "I just don't feel like swimming right now..." And with that, he sat on the edge of the pool, dangling only his legs in the water - clearly hedging his bets just in case there were any sharks lurking underneath the surface...

And then of course, there are the children who require very little reassurance about these things! A six year old friend of mine, Mateo, told me about a young friend of his, who was "the littlest one in the group, but not scared at all" when they watched the movie King Kong. "Everyone was talking about how gross and scary it was to see all the blood, and she just said - Don't be silly, it's just ketchup anyway"!



I do think that some kids are more sensitive to things than others, and it's worth being aware which category of child you are dealing with, rather than instituting blanket bans on these matters.

His sister, nine-year-old Juni chipped in with another story, also about a much younger child, Gracie. "There was this big thunderstorm, and lots of lightning, and her older sister Riley and I were so scared, we were hiding under the covers! And do you know what Gracie said?? She said "It's just a noise! What are you so scared of?" Clearly, Juni was torn between admiration and exasperation at the five-year-old's response!

Not that older children are the only ones put to shame by the bravery of little ones. Having struggled with a lifelong dislike (okay, okay, terror!) of cockroaches, I have always been embarrassed to confess to this before the majority of my compatriots, most of whom are known to be quite blasé in their handling of these nasty little creatures (the most common form of dispatching them being a swift "stamp and kick away" motion that I have watched with helpless admiration on all too many occasions...)

So it was with despair and self loathing that I listened when Joya, the two-year-old daughter of my friend Tina told me how (and she was indignant about this!) a cockroach that she had been talking to had run away from her! After all, she had just been asking the rude creature if he was well, and whether he had had his dinnertime bottle of milk. I didn't have the heart to tell her that any cockroach that ran in any direction other than very quickly away from me, would have elicited a highly embarrassing reaction! After all, she's little, and still thinks I'm cool... ■