Funny magic tricks for kids: the ones that get a laugh, not just a gasp

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Eight magic tricks for kids that are funny as well as clever, why a trick that fails on purpose plays better, and how to write the words that get the laugh.

A nine-year-old doing magic has two things an adult magician does not: no reputation to protect, and perfect comic timing they have no idea they possess. Lean into that and the show gets twice as good, because a laugh is easier to earn than a gasp and it lasts longer in the room.

I spent last week finishing the Peabody Magic Shop, sixty tricks a child can do with things already in the house. Sorting them for a running order, I noticed the ones my own kids kept performing were not the cleverest. They were the funny ones.

Why funny is easier than amazing

An amazing trick has to be perfect. A funny trick does not — and better than that, a funny trick survives going wrong, because "it went wrong" is itself the joke. That turns the thing every beginner is frightened of into the thing they are aiming at.

It also solves the hardest problem a young magician has, which is what to do with their face. A child performing a serious miracle has to look mysterious, which is hard. A child performing a joke only has to look pleased with themselves, which is not.

Eight that get a laugh

- Trick: Thumb Off · The joke: You pull your own thumb apart. Everyone's face does the same thing. · How long to learn: A minute
- Trick: The Elbow Vanish · The joke: It fails twice on purpose before it works · How long to learn: Fifteen minutes
- Trick: The Bending Spoon · The joke: All the work is the groaning · How long to learn: Three minutes
- Trick: The Rubber Pencil · The joke: A pencil that has given up being solid · How long to learn: A minute
- Trick: The Obedient Egg · The joke: You tell an egg off, in front of people · How long to learn: Five minutes
- Trick: The Escape Loops · The joke: Two people tied together, climbing over each other · How long to learn: Fifteen minutes
- Trick: The Hole in Your Hand · The joke: The audience does it to themselves and yelps · How long to learn: A minute

- Trick: The Spooky Floating Cup · The joke: A cup that has forgotten how to be a cup · How long to learn: Five minutes

Failing on purpose is a real technique

The Elbow Vanish is the clearest example in the shop. You rub a coin into your elbow to make it vanish and you drop it. You pick it up and try again, and you drop it again. By now the room is laughing at you rather than with you, which is exactly where you want them, because nobody laughing at a person is watching that person's other hand.

On the third go the coin genuinely vanishes. The two failures were the method.

Beginners always want to cut them. Do not cut them: a trick that works three times out of three is a demonstration, and a trick that works once out of three is a story.

Writing the words

The shop gives every trick a line to say, and the funny ones follow three rules that are worth stealing:

1. Say the obvious thing. "Metal is only hard if you believe it is. I don't, particularly." The joke is that you are explaining something absurd in a reasonable voice.
2. Let the prop be the character. The egg is stubborn. The cup has forgotten how to be a cup. The band is haunted. A child who is shy about performing finds it much easier to be rude about a spoon than to be mysterious about themselves.
3. Stop talking at the reveal. Say the magic word, then be quiet for one full second. The laugh needs a gap to arrive in.

Where to put them in a show

Not all at the end. The show builder orders a show opener ? helper trick ? everyone trick ? wow trick ? closer, and the funny ones belong in the first two slots: a laugh early buys you the attention you need for the serious trick at the end.

One exception. If a child is nervous — genuinely nervous, not pretend-nervous — put a funny trick last as well. Finishing on a laugh is a much kinder ending than finishing on silence while they wait to see whether it worked.

Printables

There is a practice log and a show checklist to print, plus the Magician's Code to sign, which my seven-year-old treated with the seriousness of a mortgage.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026, and the Magic Shop needs no sign-up at all. The tricks a child has learned and performed stay on their own device; the only thing sent is an anonymous count when a trick is marked as shown to somebody.