The Magician's Code for kids: why the secret matters more than the trick

Peabody blog · Games · updated 2026-10-30

The five promises of the Magician's Code in a child's words, why keeping the secret is the first grown-up thing about magic, and what to say when a trick goes wrong.

The Magician's Code is five promises: keep the secret, practise before you perform, never do the same trick twice for the same people, never make a helper look silly, and never say the magic is real. The secret comes first because it is the only part of a trick that can be lost for good. A child who gives it away hasn't just spoiled one trick; they've spoiled it for everybody that person ever tells.

Every child who learns a trick wants to tell somebody how it works, usually straight away. Mine certainly did. That is natural, and it is also the moment the trick stops being magic. So when I built the Magic Shop, the Code went in as promises rather than rules, because a child keeps a promise they made and ignores a rule somebody handed them.

The five promises

- The promise: I will keep the secret. · Why, in the shop's words: Once somebody knows, the surprise is gone for ever, for them and for everybody they tell. · Where the shop backs it up: Flick's line at the foot of the trick sheet Pick me a trick prints, and a guide's answer to "how did you do that?"
- The promise: I will practise before I perform. · Why, in the shop's words: A trick shown too early is a trick spoiled. · Where the shop backs it up: Every trick has a learning time; the Wizard tricks are measured in days.
- The promise: I will not do the same trick twice for the same people. · Why, in the shop's words: The second time, they know where to look. · Where the shop backs it up: Two trick pages say once is enough, or three times at most.
- The promise: I will never make a helper look silly. · Why, in the shop's words: The surprise is the point; the person helping is not the joke. · Where the shop backs it up: Magic School's lesson on helpers.
- The promise: I will not say my magic is real. · Why, in the shop's words: Magic is a performance, like music or juggling. · Where the shop backs it up: No trick in the shop is allowed to say otherwise; the shop's code checks the words.

The promises are on the magic words page, each with its why. The printables page has the Code to sign, with a line for a name and a date. In our house it went on the fridge.

Why the secret matters more than the trick

A trick is two things: what the audience sees, and how it is done. Magicians call them the effect and the method. The effect is the part people remember. The method is usually small, a finger behind a pencil or a card that was second from the top all along, and once somebody has seen the method, the effect never works on them again.

That is why the shop's guide to the Magician's Code for kids calls keeping the secret the first grown-up thing about magic. It is a promise to the next audience, people the child hasn't even met yet.

It also makes the child braver. A magician who knows the secret is safe can relax and perform, look at the audience instead of their hands, and pause before the reveal. The secret is what the confidence rests on.

What to say when somebody asks

Somebody always asks "How did you do that?" The shop's answer is friendly and closed: "A magician never tells. Want to see another one?" Then show another trick. The question is answered kindly, and it turns into more of the show.

Flick, the rabbit who runs the shop, says it too. When Pick me a trick hands over a trick, the sheet you can print for it ends with Flick's line: a magician's first rule is to practise before you perform, and keep the secret.

There are two honest exceptions in the shop, and I like that it admits them. Thumb Off says that if somebody walks round to the side and sees it, let them, then show them how, because that is how magic spreads. The Rubber Pencil says this one is famous, and everybody should know it. Both are tricks every grown-up already half knows. For the rest, the promise holds.

When a trick goes wrong: outs

The Code and the outs belong together, because the moment a trick goes wrong is the moment a child is most tempted to explain it.

Magic School's lesson on outs has three, in order. One: finish anyway, because many tricks have a second ending, and every trick page has an "If something goes wrong". Two: laugh. "Even wizards have off days" buys the room back. Three: move on to the next trick straight away, and never explain.

What a child must never do, the lesson says, is apologise twice or say "it normally works". The audience only knows something went wrong if you tell them. That's the secret again: an out keeps it.

Every one of the eighty tricks in the shop has its own out. Five of them are the shop's chosen tricks for learning outs:

- Trick: The Grey Elephant Prediction · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 7 to 12 · Learn it in: 3 minutes
- Trick: Which Hand? · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes
- Trick: The Balloon Static Wand · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 10 · Learn it in: 5 minutes
- Trick: The Elbow Vanish · Level: Conjurer · Ages: 7 to 12 · Learn it in: 15 minutes
- Trick: The Broken Toothpick Restored · Level: Conjurer · Ages: 7 to 11 · Learn it in: 15 minutes

Which Hand? is the one I'd start with. It is honestly a guess, so it goes wrong some of the time, and its out is a line every child can say: "Your brain is too strong for me!" Then go again. A child who has used an out twice in front of a brother or sister stops being afraid of a trick going wrong.

The other three promises, briefly

Practise first. Magic School's rule is "Practise until it's boring for you. That's when it becomes amazing for them." The order it gives is a mirror, then a pet or a stuffed animal, then one person who loves you, then everybody.

Never twice. The Levitating Card says to do it once and move on, and the Card That Keeps Coming Back says three times at most, because a trick that keeps happening gets easier to catch.

Be kind to helpers. Ask, don't grab, use their name, give them something real to do, and if they get something wrong, it was your fault, out loud. Then let them take the clap.

Questions grown-ups ask

Isn't keeping secrets something we teach kids not to do?

This is a different kind, and it's worth saying so out loud. A magic secret is a surprise kept for an audience, like a present kept until the birthday. It is about how a trick is done, never about a person, and the child is the one choosing to keep it. The Code's last promise, never saying the magic is real, keeps the whole thing honest.

My child already told their sister how it works. Now what?

That's fine, and very common. The trick is spoiled for one person, not for ever. Pick a new trick, and make the sister the helper for it. A child who has felt the trick die once usually understands the first promise better than any explanation could make them.

Is there a way to make the Code stick?

Sign it. The printable version has the five promises and a line for a name and a date, and a promise a child signed is one they remember. The shop also has a short quiz, What would Flick say?, for practising the answers.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026, and the Magic Shop needs no sign-up. What a child learns stays on their own device; the only thing sent is an anonymous count when a trick is marked as shown to somebody. For a story to keep for later, the library has plenty.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/magicians-code-for-kids