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# under over

An Inside Guide for Young Magicians and their Parents **By Joshua Jay**

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# Under, Over

An Inside Guide for Young Magicians and their Parents

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# Acknowledgments

My original idea was simple: I wanted to write a manual for young magicians, and I wanted it to be free. Being a magician can be tough, and so can being a teenager. Being both presents a unique set of opportunities and challenges. When I started in magic I was surrounded by an overwhelmingly supportive group of family, friends, and magicians. None of them charged me for advice, nor will I charge you. In a few years you will be a seasoned, adult performer, and invariably someone young will seek out advice from you. I hope this book and the spirit it is presented inspires you to share what you learned.

Many magicians have shared their talents with me and *Under, Over* is better for their efforts. Danny Cole, Andi Gladwin, David Oliver, Mike Segal, Joel Ward, Kristi Toguchi, Jeff Liebowitz and David Parr are all young (or formerly young) magicians whose careers have flourished and who have chosen to give back to the youth of magic. They were obvious choices to consult, and I'm honored that they have participated. Rod Doiron, Raj Madhok, and David Parr proofread the manuscript in various stages; thanks, gents. Andi Gladwin, my business partner, greeted this non-profit idea with enthusiasm and has kindly provided his editing and artistic touch to the manuscript and layout. It is only with his help that *Under, Over* is transmitted to young magicians everywhere.

I would also like to thank Albert Lasher for his commitment to the young magic scene in New York City. Albert established and hosts a young magicians club that meets monthly for lectures, shows, fundraisers, and workshops. He is an inspiring, selfless man and he has influenced countless teenagers on their path in magic. Albert kindly allowed me to beta-test *Under, Over* with his group. The kids in his group (and their parents) read the manuscript and offered me invaluable feedback. I'm pleased that the book works in the way it is intended, and the young magicians in Albert's group deserve acknowledgment for that.

Finally, a shout-out to my own parents. *Under, Over* is mostly about the elements in magic a kid can control. But we can't control who are parents are or how supportive they will be. My mom and dad were so helpful: supportive in every way but never overbearing. Dad never got to see this book, but I think he would have liked it. And Mom continues to be my biggest supporter. Thanks, both of you.

Under, Over

## Introduction to *Under*

*“The fact that I feel there to be a definite need for this book is evidenced by my having written it.”*

*—Dariel Fitzkee, Showmanship for Magicians*

I was at a magic competition years ago. A boy of eleven competed. He was well rehearsed and he did strong magic, yet he left the audience cold. I'll describe what I remember of his act.

He began with a difficult coin trick, and talked about an experience he had at the bank: “So then the teller says...and I said to the teller...so I went to my lawyer’s office...” Next he invited a woman on stage and asked her to sign a playing card: “And if you could also put down your phone number and a good time to reach you...” At the conclusion of the routine he removed a leather wallet from his coat pocket and there, among his credit cards, was the signed card.

Bank accounts? Lawyers? Cheesy lines on middle-aged women? These aren’t the things kids think about! Eleven-year-olds don’t *carry* wallets, let alone credit cards to put in them. And at eleven (as I remember), guys don’t want anything to do with girls! This boy was doing the unthinkable—he was pretending to be old!

The same boy competed a couple years later. He was thirteen and a little taller. His voice was squeaky. But this time he was dressed in a collared shirt, like other kids his age. Instead of playing cards, he used baseball





cards! Instead of coins, he did tricks with Lego blocks. At one point in his act, his voice cracked and the audience started laughing. The boy-performer called attention to his changing voice and commented, "This trick is going to sound even cooler when my voice drops." An outburst of laughter consumed the room; the kid was rocking because his show was honest—he was being real. In under two years, he had learned to make his age work *for* him. Oh, and he won the competition. That kid was me. Back then I had to deal with all the problems you're facing as a young magician now, and I'm pleased to pass on what I've learned.

So you're a magician and you're young. Your audience will notice your age; there's no way around it. "Wow, he looks like he's still in school," a woman might whisper to her husband. "How good could he possibly be?" the husband might reply. The first part of this book, *Under* (as in *under 18*), is intended to help you find ways to make your age work for you rather than against you.

The second part of the book, *Over*, is the part you'll want your parents to read. Make no mistake—I hope you read it, too, but parents write to me all the time with questions such as, "Is this a good hobby for my son?" or "Is my daughter too young to become a magician?" or, a personal favorite, "Can you actually make a career out of this?" I'm in your corner here, and in *Over* I'll make sure they see magic for what it is. (Oh, and check out the part where I tell them it's okay to miss school for magic conventions!)

In the pages to come, I'll answer as honestly as I can some of the most frequently asked questions I've received over the years. But there's one question I won't be addressing: "Should I become a magician?" If you don't know the answer to that question, without hesitation, then you aren't serious about magic. That's fine—this stuff isn't for everyone.

Most young people drift out of magic because they got into it for the wrong reasons. Some people get into magic because they want to know how stuff is done or because they think it's easy once they know the secret.



Some older ones are just looking for a way to get a date. Others are allured by cool-looking gadgets. But these reasons become unfulfilling; I mean, there's only so much shelf space for unused magic. Most of these kids fade away when they discover girls or basketball. But there are a few of us who stay with it because we realize what magic really has to offer.

I'm going to assume that you're one of us—that you figured out what magic has to offer and your heart is in the right place. Glad you're here; we've got lots to talk about.

*Joshua Jay*  
New York City  
September, 2008

# What kind of tricks should I learn?

Tricks, tricks, tricks. I'll bet there's one trick—one incredible magic effect—that made you want to be a magician. For me, it was a trick called "Out of this World"<sup>1</sup>. The desire to learn new tricks is natural; I always want to learn more. But this healthy desire to learn tricks has a hidden danger. Don't become the kid who has all of the latest magic effects, purchased because of an attention-getting ad or video, but can't actually do any of them. Instead, be the kid who can do a twenty-minute show out of your pockets or entertain a roomful of people with only the contents of a briefcase.

I had been in magic less than a year when kids at school started to talk about my strange hobby. "See that kid?" someone would whisper. "He does magic." At the lunch table in fourth grade, a group of kids joined my table and asked me to do a trick. I smiled and said I didn't have my magic trunk. "Then just do something spontaneous for us." I suddenly realized that when I wasn't lugging my heavy trunk full of props, I couldn't do any magic. I was crushed.

Many young magicians have boxes and closets full of magic effects that they can't do. Magic becomes a hobby of collecting, of *acquiring*, rather than performing. My advice is to take the time to learn to perform the magic you already have before acquiring more. And be prepared for people to expect you to be a magician 24 hours a day, even when you aren't carrying a bag of tricks. When someone finds out that you're a magician, the next question will be: "Can you show me something?"

1. My dad performed it for me and *wouldn't* tell me how it was done. I was hooked. This trick was invented by Paul Curry and first marketed in 1942. In effect, the spectator deals a face-down deck into two piles...and separates them by color!

# But can you go into more detail?

## Specifically, what tricks should I learn?

What tricks should you learn? That's entirely up to you, of course. But consider this: You're going to be in many situations in which you'll be asked to perform magic impromptu—spontaneously. People will be less considerate of your time and mood because you are young. It's unfair but true. As an adult, I can respectfully decline a request with a smile: "I'm so sorry, but now isn't a good time. Perhaps next time!" When I was very young, I remember being *forced* to perform by teachers, family members, or even strangers who heard of my peculiar interest. There's nothing you can do to avoid this except to be prepared. I'll tell you how.

There are certain special things you can carry with you for use in spontaneous performances, and other material you can learn to do with objects you're already carrying. Right now, I'm guessing you have a quarter, a couple of dollar bills, a pencil, and a cell phone. When I was between the ages of eight and fifteen, I used those basic objects for magic more often than any other props — with the exception of the cell phone. For the majority of my childhood, only grown-ups carried cell phones. Now, cell phones are practically universal, which is great because they provide marvelous opportunities for magic! Here are a few examples of the magic I performed with those common objects:

### **Slow Motion Bill Transpo**

In this classic effect invented by U.F. Grant, your folded one-dollar bill changes places with your friend's five-dollar bill. There are many methods for accomplishing this effect, and one that is completely impromptu is explained later, in the trick section.

### **Misled**

Timothy Wenk invented a fabulous penetration effect using a "#2" pencil and a borrowed bill. (This use of the #2 pencil is far more exciting than its other intended purpose: standardized tests.) David Copperfield performed this on national television when I was younger and it caused a huge stir. At one point in the trick, the pencil apparently melts through the side of the bill. The gaff is tiny but sturdy and will fit on any yellow, #2 pencil. You can purchase this effect from any good source of magic supplies, such as [Vanishing Inc.](#)

### **A Retention Pass**

This move is the cornerstone of impromptu magic. You can do it with a quarter, a penny, a paperclip, a sugar packet, or almost any other small object that you might find at school, in a restaurant, or at home. I would typically perform thirty seconds of magic with nothing more than a quarter and this move, removing it from a friend's ear, causing it to disappear, and then reappear on another friend's knee. A detailed description of this move is included in the trick section.

### **Pencil through Quarter**

Presley Guitar invented a fabulous gaffed coin that allows you to push a lit cigarette through a coin. Well, it really isn't cool for anyone underage to be handling cigarettes. So...use a pencil. Be advised that they manufacture a gimmick specifically for pencils and *not* cigarettes, but these gaffs work with an elastic band instead of a metal spring. I prefer the durability of the metal spring. You can purchase an exquisite "Cigarette through Coin" made by Johnson Products or an economical piece made by Tango Magic from [Vanishing Inc.](#)

### **Cell Phone Predictions**

I didn't get a cellular phone until I was in High School, and even then, I was the first in school to have such a device. I often used it for prediction effects. You can utilize the camera-phone feature to show a predicted card as the phone's wallpaper. You'll learn my favorite cell phone effect in the trick section.

# Should I become a street magician?

A bizarre, game-changing trend has surfaced in magic, and you are its target market: street magic. You are being inundated with magic downloads and websites with teenagers in skull t-shirts and ripped jeans. These magicians are different. They don't talk much, and their tricks are chopped up by heavy editing and spliced with grimy street scenes.

Don't believe the hype. This new genre of magic is mostly a repackaging of older ideas, catered to your demographic. Sadly, there is rarely any emphasis on performing or audience interaction, and some of the people featured on these downloads have less performing experience than you do. Choose your role models carefully.

What I like about this movement (and the websites that support it) is the excitement for magic. These magicians do understand what makes magic special, and the enthusiasm is contagious. There are plenty of good tricks on these sites, too. Good magic will always speak to you, whether you download it or find it in a hundred-year-old book. A real magician thinks about performance and technique equally, so if you do decide to pursue this style of magic, understand that you can vary and change the tricks to suit your style of performance.

*“There is real magic in enthusiasm. It spells the difference between mediocrity and accomplishment”*

*—Norman Vincent Peale*

## What should I talk about?

*“Your tricks, and the manner in which you perform them, should be an expression of your life, not a substitute for one.”*

—Mike Close

“So,” you ask yourself, sitting on the floor surrounded by all your magic props, “what am I going to say while I’m doing these tricks?”

I would ask the following questions first. What are your *other* interests? What do you hate? What do you love? What is the most memorable vacation you have ever taken? If you could make anything in the world disappear, what would it be? Every answer is a trick waiting to be discovered.

Any time you can use a prop or tell a story that conveys something about yourself, you become an artist! At its best, magic is a form of self-expression. It sounds silly—and it’s hard to come up with examples because most adult magicians never learned this. But magic tailored to you is automatically tailored to your age.

Most magic tricks are invented by adult magicians (hereafter referred to as “old people”). Old people buy most of the tricks. And since old people invent most of the tricks and old people buy most of the tricks, old people write most of the instructions. That means that when you buy a trick, you’ve got an extra step to carry out. You have to *adapt* your magic.

A perfect example is the “Cigarette through Coin” effect, mentioned above. You and your friends aren’t allowed to smoke...so you have to adapt. What small round object can you find in the places you hang out in? A pencil? A crayon? A paintbrush? What about a shoe lace? A French fry? These solutions may seem ridiculous, but part of being a magician is being able to adapt to your surroundings.

2. I published a handling of a paintbrush through coin in [Joshua Jay’s Magic Atlas](#). The unique feature of a paintbrush is that since the bristles of the brush are soft, the trapdoor in the standard gaff closes smoothly around the bristles. As you pull the brush through the coin, the hole visibly gets smaller and smaller and closes without a sound. I performed the trick on national television on *Lance Burton’s Young Magician’s Showcase*, and got a great reaction during the phase of pulling the brush from the coin.

I developed an interest in gambling material long before I was allowed in casinos. I loved that most people were familiar with poker and blackjack, and most were interested in demonstrations of cheating. But I couldn't claim to be a cheater or even an expert at a game my audiences knew I wasn't allowed to play. This is an example of how, at seventeen, I tailored an "old people" trick to fit my age and personality<sup>3</sup>.

*People are always asking me the same thing. They don't ask, "How do you do that?" They don't ask me to teach them a card trick. What people want to know is: "How would you do in a game of poker?"*

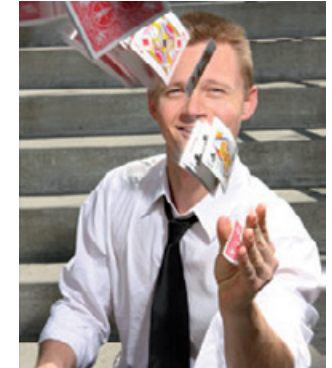
*Well, to be honest... I have no idea! I'm only seventeen! I can't even get inside a casino, let alone cheat! But I got to thinking one day, and so I developed a game that I could practice in my room to "test" my cheating abilities. Here's the idea: I'm going to try to locate the best poker hand I can possibly find in one shuffle and four cuts...*

**I adapted lots of classic tricks to fit my style. I sometimes used cookies instead of coins and baseball cards instead of**

3. See Paradise Aces Plus from my lecture notes, A Teen's Routines: Updated and Expanded, 2003 or [Volume Three of my DVD series, Close-up. Up Close.](#)

## Joel Ward

Joel Ward is an accomplished stage magician whose act is always changing, always on the cutting edge. He performs all over the world in gala events and has staged his own full illusion show. And at 24, he has had to transition from being a young magician to just a magician. As he progresses in magic, his material has always been tailored to his personality. Here are his thoughts on the subject...



Performing magic as a young magician is an incredible experience—I'm envious of all of you. For the first time, you are able to take elements that happen in your daily life and implement them into your magic acts. And this is a really fun thing to do!

I started putting together my first stage act with doves when I was a young teenager. I used music that I liked at the time, which in turn pumped me up when I was onstage (Tag Team's "Whoop, There it is" comes to mind). I used fun, weird ideas that were going through my head and found out a way to make them into tricks (a feature of my act was giving a blue-colored dove a bath onstage, and changing its color to white).

As I get older, I have to adjust my act to fit my age. I am a young man now, so I dress like one. My music tastes are always changing, and my act reflects this. I still dig the old music I used as a teenager, but it no longer fits the act. Ideas will flow in and out as you get older, and it's important to allow your act to evolve and remain open for change.



playing cards. My script was more fanciful than older magicians. The stories I told with my tricks were not about outsmarting a cheater or swindling a guy on the street; they were about outsmarting my parents or making my homework disappear.

## Getting into magic

How did you get into magic? My dad was the one who introduced me to magic, but for many, it all started with a magic set. I was already interested in magic when I got my first magic set—it was a crummy one with plastic tricks and instructions I couldn't understand. But magic sets have been inspiring kids for hundreds of years, and I have developed a fascination with older sets, from a time when more care was put into the packages. Many magicians who grew up in the first part of the 20th century were given Gilbert's Mysto Magic set. These boxes were filled with wooden and metal props: linking rings, springs, gaffed coins, specialty cards, and a beautiful wood wand. They even came with posters. The child would fill in his own name and the date of his performance, and he could advertise himself to other neighborhood kids. Even though I am more than fifty years too young to have been given a Mysto set, I collect them now and marvel at how fun it must have been to build a show with these charming props.



## Should I play up my age?

What makes your magic unique is you, not just your age. Your age is part of who you are, and it informs your interests, the way you talk, the way you dress, and the way you perform. But “youth” should never be your only hook; it’s a cheap gimmick and, eventually, you’ll grow up.

Some young magicians play the age card too heavy—I know I did. I used to have business cards that read, *Award Winning Teenage Magician*. And you know what sort of compliments this garnered? “That Josh Jay...he’s good for his age.”

Good for his age? You want to earn your audience’s respect with the quality of your magic independent of your age. So let your youth influence the way you perform, but don’t let it overshadow your most important asset: you!

## What should I wear?

*“A magician’s credibility is in inverse ratio to the number of sequins on his costume.”*

*—Tony Andruzzi, The Experience of Magic*

Since your appearance is the first thing your audience will notice, it’s a good place for us to start. There is no way to hide your age. From the moment you start your performance, your audience will notice you’re different... but different is good! If you show the audience that you are comfortable with who you are, they will become comfortable with you, too.

So, what should you wear? The typical magician wears a tuxedo or—even worse—a corny tie with a playing card print. Fortunately, you’re not the typical magician. Capitalize on your youth. Wear something cool but classy, a bit flashier than the older guys. I wore bright-colored suits with loud ties when I was a kid. When I walked into a venue before the show, there was never any doubt who the magician was...I had arrived! That said, I eventually took things too far. I assumed wearing Crayola colors would capitalize on the kid-thing. Wearing actual crayons would have been a better idea, based on the ridiculous photos that haunt me to this day.

Oh well.

Female magicians have other concerns. I remember watching a sixteen-year-old girl do an act in a competition wearing what looked like a thong bikini with only a sheer, translucent robe over it. On the stage, there was a support beam that ran from ceiling to floor. The guy next to me whispered, “I wonder if her next trick involves dancing on that pole.” Whether it’s the influence of their parents or their own decision, every time a female magician dresses like a stripper, it makes it harder for women to be taken seriously as magicians.

# I'm a girl. Can I become a magician, too?

Absolutely. I'm so pleased that magic is attracting so many females today—women in magic were rare before your generation, but that trend is changing. At magic camp last year, there were three girls' cabins!

The advice I have specifically for young, female magicians is to resist the urge to make your femininity your only hook. I'm tired of seeing female magicians playing the same character: flighty and flirty with a twist of "gotcha!" Nobody likes that shtick because it plays into the hands of people who wrongly believe that women aren't talented enough to do magic.

You can and should address your gender, because it is a noticeable part of who you are. Just don't make it your only hook—capitalize on other, personality-driven traits that make you who you are.

Do the kind of magic you like to watch, ladies, and make your performances more about yourself and less about your gender.

## Kristi Toguchi

Women in magic have come a long way in my short lifetime. When I was a teen magician I was one of the only females at conventions and in competitions. There is a comparatively huge presence today, and I see groups of young magicians hanging together at conventions. I hope that this trend continues.



Gender will not determine whether you will be a successful magician; only your skills will do that. There have been isolated occurrences when clients specifically requested a female magician and I got a show, but I normally get gigs the way my male cohorts get them.

The difficult situation I had to deal with as a young female magician was earning respect from other magicians. I have been told that women should only be assistants. When I was younger this mentality affected me greatly, but it made me want to be a good magician even more. I never looked at magicians differently based on their sex—why should anyone else? But this is show business, and when you put yourself out there people will always have an opinion. You just can't let sexist people, inside or outside our industry, hold you down.

As young female magicians, we have a huge responsibility to promote equality both to our fellow magicians and to our audiences. And the best way to do that is to do great magic.

## Do I need a teacher?

Most magicians would say yes, but I remain unconvinced. I'm of the belief that most magicians aren't very good. I also believe that most students end up just like the teachers they learn from. You see where I'm going here? A teacher/student relationship can only work in magic if both parties understand the difference between teaching and copying.

The advantages of a mentor are obvious: you move at exactly your own pace, you can ask questions, and you receive unique feedback.

The disadvantages are not so easily seen. Even the cautious student cannot help but be influenced by the technique and performance style of his teacher. And without concern for this factor, it's easy to become a watered-down clone. I remember watching a teenage girl compete at a convention. To everyone's surprise, she performed like a sleazy, middle-aged bartender. Turns out, her teacher was a *sleazy, middle-aged bartender*.

I never had a mentor, and I'm actually glad I didn't. My home in Canton, Ohio was far away from any potential mentors, so books became my teachers. I had to work things out for myself, and when I didn't know the solution to a problem, I had to invent one. And you know something? The process was fun! It was exciting to put together a show by myself in the basement, and then test it out in front of a crowd. It was fun to track down every book I could find that described an Ambitious Card routine, and use all the sources to compile my own routine. This self-imposed education in magic gave me the foundation I rely on today every time I approach a new routine.

## Who do I listen to?

As a young magician, everyone offers you advice. Your spectators, Uncle Bob, your older brother, the magicians in your local club, and lots and lots of internet forum “experts.” Who do you trust?

You should listen to everyone, and trust only yourself. Your spectators and friends and family can provide you with invaluable help: a funny line here, a weak point there. And siblings are only too happy to let you know you’re flashing; if you can fool your siblings, you can fool anyone. And magicians can be helpful, too. Even the magic internet forums have some great personalities who generously share their opinions with anyone who will listen.

But what sounds good isn’t always good in real practice. And what works for one magician may not work for another. A local magician watched my act and told me I needed to smile all the time: “That’s show biz, kid. Keep a grin on your face all the time.” I tried that. Once. It was incredibly awkward for me to smile for no reason for minutes on end, and it weirded out my audience completely. It may have worked for him (though, honestly, I doubt it). But it didn’t work for me at all.

The best you can do is try the suggestions offered to you, but objectively assess if they work well and then adapt accordingly.

### Daniel Garcia



*Daniel Garcia is one of my favorite magicians. We grew up in magic around the same time and had many similar experiences. Today Danny is one of the most creative and innovative magicians on the scene. But as you’ll see, even Danny got attitude from older magicians. So while the above section explores who you should listen to, Danny gives us great advice on what happens when nobody listens to you.*

“Sometimes older magicians can be mean and elitist. I remember a particular magic club meeting; I was 13 years old, and I wanted to learn the pass. I asked various members for help with this move—a move I had only heard about, but one I apparently needed to know to become a serious card magician. The only response I got was, “You don’t need to learn that. Just do a double-undercut.” Another guy—someone who had never seen me work—said that I wasn’t ready to learn the pass.

But you know something? Their hands-off attitude just made me want to learn it more. I sought out several books and videos, and within months I was doing a pass I was proud of. I tell you this because you have to channel the negative energy from older magicians, and use it as motivation to improve.”

## Where can I go for help with my act?

David Oliver has done as much for the youth in magic as anyone in our industry. He has played an instrumental role in the Society of Young Magicians since its founding and has helped set the curriculum at Tannen's Magic Camp (where he is perennially a favorite counselor) for over twenty years. David has influenced my magic immensely, and I could not conceive of a book for young magicians without his input. I asked David where he suggests you go for help with your act:

It's important for you to have another magicians critique your act, but sometimes that's not enough. Try your act out on a trusted teacher or a drama coach at school, or maybe a small group of friends at home or at your church. Ask them to tell you what they liked about the act and what they didn't like - and tell them to be brutally honest. Then, as much as it may hurt, listen, write down every suggestion, then go home, put the notebook away and come back to it a week later. You'll be able to look at it with fresh eyes, and less emotion than you did when the critique was actually taking place. The more often you do this, the easier it will become to take the critique, to fix your act, and the better you will become.

Following my shows, I like to meet my audience, and ask them questions. This gets you fresh, untainted comments. I'll usually thank them for their initial comment and follow up with a quick question of my own, like, "What was your favorite part of the show?" That gives them a chance to tell you what's working in the act. Then I'll ask, if there was something you didn't like in the show, what would that be. Now is when you need to listen carefully: these are the people you are trying to entertain, so find out what they like and dislike, use that information and you'll be a better performer.

Of course, having a mentor in magic is also a good thing. Someone who has already had the experience you want to have can greatly assist you if you are willing to listen and learn. Several of the young people I have worked with over the past 25 years have been part of the S.Y.M., attended the Tannen's or Sorcerer's Safari Camps (see pages 83 - 85 for more info). Everyone there has the same goal - to improve your magic.

Finally, the best person to trust when helping your act is you. After all the advice, after the lessons and attending the camps, you'll know what feels right in the act, and hopefully what has to go. Trust yourself.



# What should I buy?

An equal share of kids and parents contact me, asking me this question. Often, they have it narrowed down. “Which one’s better: ‘Pen through Tongue’ or ‘Handkerchief through Mirror?’” Even with the best intentions, these questions are, unfortunately, not the right ones to ask.

Books and DVDs are almost always a better investment than tricks. From a financial standpoint, you’re getting more information for your money. Magic price tags are mostly standardized. That is, a majority of professional magic books released today cost 40 dollars. Typical close-up effects are sold separately for 15 dollars (obviously, there are lots of exceptions). Most magic books contain between 20 and 50 effects, and most tricks sold separately contain...just one.

Books and DVDs have other advantages. They are examinations of a performer’s mind, or a detailed study of a particular topic. Cuddling with a book or watching a DVD lets you see, repeatedly, the process of how the subject thinks or approaches magic. This might, in turn, help you develop your skills as a creator or performer. When you buy a single trick, you are only seeing the subject through a narrow tunnel—a mere sliver of their repertoire.

## **I get the idea; there’s better value in books and DVDs. But which titles should I buy?**

I am asked this question almost as much as I ask it. Growing up, I asked every magician I knew what books or videos they could recommend. I got lots of bad advice, and I’ve got the library to prove it.

As a young person, your needs are different than an older magician. You’re also growing up in the middle of an information explosion. So much media is being released—and in new forms (e-books, CD-ROMs, DVDs, etc.). Your path to excellence is different than an adult-beginner, and it’s different than someone who started twenty years ago.

Every old magician recommends the same list of books: Dariel Fitzkee’s trilogy (*The Trick Brain*, *Magic by Misdirection*, and *Showmanship for Magicians*<sup>4</sup>), *The Tarbell Course in Magic*<sup>5</sup>, The Dai Vernon Book of Magic<sup>6</sup>, *Close-up Card Magic*, and *Magic and Showmanship*<sup>7</sup>.

4. These three books are all excellent food for thought, but only for the student able to distinguish what is important from what is outdated. The Trick Brain takes a scientific approach to categorizing magic—always a dangerous proposition. I actually enjoy this book, though at times I feel like I’m the only one who does.

5. This was originally serialized, and then bound in eight volumes.

6. Vernon’s work should be the model for anyone studying close-up magic, but most of the material in this book can only be approached after a mastery of the basic sleights has been obtained (you can’t perform the ball and cone without a knowledge of the retention vanish).



7. This book pairs up timeless advice with some of the most dreadful tricks and presentations one can imagine. Nelms talks about the importance of meaning in magic on one page, and illustrates his take on “Hippity-Hop Rabbits” on the next.

8. By Jean Hugard and Frederick Braue. Although I didn’t find this book particularly accessible as a beginner, it became increasingly interesting and helpful as I improved. When you buy this book, I would suggest two courses of action. You can find the book on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) in a cheap paperback edition for \$10. However, when you’re ready to digest this treatise, I would suggest the rare third edition, which has additional material by Dai Vernon and Dr. Jacob Daley. This material is some of the best in the book, and is worth the fifty-dollar premium you’ll likely pay for this scarce edition.

9. Actually called *The Expert at the Card Table*, by S.W. Erdnase. This book can also be obtained inexpensively at a local bookstore or the aforementioned website.

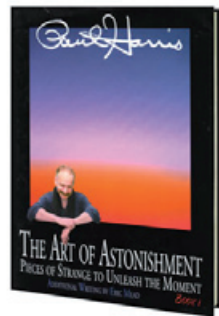
10. *Expert Card Technique* devotes less than 30 pages to explain the double lift, bottom deal, and pass...combined. Books have been written about these sleights.

Looking back, I’m not convinced the “standard” texts are the best for you right now. I adore most all the classic texts—even the ones I haven’t listed. But I’m basing my list on what was most helpful to me as a kid. Certain “beginner” books aren’t really beginner books at all. Most of them are better-suited to the advanced student.

For example, everyone starting in card magic is told to read *Expert Card Technique*<sup>8</sup> and *Erdnase*<sup>9</sup>. These two titles are arguably the most influential books of this century on card handling. But influential isn’t the same as accessible. Published in 1940 and 1902, respectively, these books take careful study to fully understand, and the descriptions are altogether too brief for a novice to properly learn from<sup>10</sup>. At some point on your path, you’ll want to seek out these two titles. Generally, that is exactly the time they are most helpful.

With the aforementioned exceptions noted, here is a short list of some books to consider (with some age ranges I think will be helpful). It is by no means comprehensive, but working professionals the world over make a living with nothing more than the tools described therein.

## Books (in alphabetical order)



### **The Art of Astonishment by Paul Harris and Eric Mead.**

*For ages fourteen and older.*

Paul Harris creates fun effects and he makes them fun to learn. He treats playing cards like pieces of paper—you’ll be folding, tearing, gluing, and manipulating to create weird, puzzle-like magic. I find his style youthful and his writing easy to follow. This series, released in 1996, is a compilation of all his works, re-illustrated and formatted. There are more tricks here than you have time to learn. This trilogy can be purchased from any good magic dealer at 45 dollars per book.



### **The Art of Magic and Sleight of Hand by Nicholas Einhorn.**

*Perfect for ages seven and up.*

Digital photography and affordable color magic books are a development of the last ten years, and this book is the beautiful result. The tricks are taught pictorially, which is the best way for a younger magician to learn. It's affordable and every page teaches an exciting trick or sleight. For easy, instant miracles, check out this great introduction by England's Nicholas Einhorn. I found this book at Borders on the sale rack for six bucks!



### **Card College (Five volumes) by Roberto Giobbi.**

*For ages fifteen and older.*

This is the most comprehensive course in card magic. Mr. Giobbi takes the necessary space to describe every basic move you'll ever need to perform for people with a pack of cards. The series is well-planned; first he shares a sleight and then teaches several effects that use the sleight. Several chapters later, he might teach an effect that utilizes several of the moves explained earlier in the volume. You'll reference these books for as long as you're interested in card magic. This is the place to learn a double lift, a top change, a pass, and a cull. Period. Each book is 35 dollars and I recommend buying, reading, and digesting the books one at a time (purchasing the entire series at once would be information-overload). The series can be purchased from any magic shop.



### **Do the Stuff That's You by Chris Carey.**

*For ages fifteen and older.*

Chris Carey was a children's magician, and I think he understood them well. The book is a compilation of essays that appeared in magic periodicals. Thus, the format is several short pieces that are easy to digest and translate for use in your own act. There is excellent advice on how to capitalize on your youth instead of hiding it, particularly if you're interested in children's entertainment. This book is sadly out of print, but can be found on the resale market for less than 30 dollars.



### **MAGIC: The Complete Course by Joshua Jay.**

*Recommended for ages ten and up (I'm allowed to plug my own books, right?).*

In 2007 I was given an amazing opportunity and an important responsibility. I was contracted by a major publisher to write an introduction to magic for the general public. The scope of the project was big and the book is currently available everywhere books are sold. I'm quite proud of the results. You find great detail on presentation and technique, and it is profusely photographed. It also includes a two-hour DVD highlighting and teaching various tricks. You'll find sections on the history and psychology of magic, along with some of the greatest magic effects our art has to offer. This is available for less than twenty bucks.



### **The Magic Atlas by Joshua Jay.**

*For ages twelve and over (another plug? Sure).*

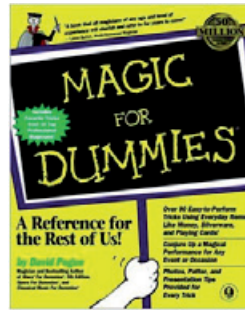
I completed this book before I was seventeen, for better and for worse. I no longer use some of the material described there because I've outgrown it. But it suited me quite well as a teenager. The props, routines, and patter themes cater to both younger performers and audiences. If you're a teenager starting a weekly strolling gig, I think you'll find this material useful. The first chapter deals exclusively with the problems young performers face when performing magic. To my knowledge, it remains the most in-depth piece on this topic. This book is 35 dollars and available at [www.joshuajay.com](http://www.joshuajay.com).



### **The Magic Book by Harry Lorayne.**

*Perfect for ages twelve and older.*

Everyone always recommends Harry Lorayne's Close-up Card Magic, but Mr. Lorayne authored this collection expressly for the beginner. And even though it was originally sold to the public, he has assembled a fantastic collection of close-up and stand-up tricks here. What sets this book apart from the rest is that Mr. Lorayne has more experience writing and teaching magic than virtually any living author. For example, the Magic Square is a fabulous mathematical stunt, but not an easy one for a kid to learn. Even at an early age, I found his description very user-friendly. The price is 35 dollars and it is currently available at most magic shops.



### **Magic for Dummies by David Pogue and Mark Levy.**

*Ideal for all ages.*

This is the perfect beginner's book. It details not only a host of clever tricks and stunts, but the book takes the time to describe them well. Nothing is assumed, the photographs are clear, and there are additional chapters on performing tips, the history of magic, and how to start performing professionally. Pay particular attention to Bob Farmer's "The Creepy Little Baby Hand" and Chad Long's "The Shuffling Lesson." This book is available for less than fourteen bucks on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).



### **Strong Magic by Darwin Ortiz.**

*For ages sixteen and older.*

This is the most modern, worthwhile study on the theory of magic. He outlines classic theories and introduces many new ideas. But what separates this book from the other great works on magic theory is that Mr. Ortiz illustrates his point with examples even kids can relate to. He often alludes to films, close-up effects, and performers even a younger generation will be familiar with. He writes in a logical, accessible style that will stimulate the beginner as well as the expert. Recently reprinted, Strong Magic is available at magic shops worldwide for about 50 dollars.

11. Ken even alludes to me on pg. 223. I was fortunate enough to be cited in a positive light in this case: "In 2002, I attended a lecture given by Joshua Jay. At one point, he was demonstrating one of his devastating moves and realized that some in the back of the room were having difficulty seeing his hands. What did he do? He jumped up on the table! He controlled the situation in a way I've seen few others do, including pros with many more years of performing experience. And this happened when he was still many months away from attaining the legal right to order a beer!"



### **Maximum Entertainment by Ken Weber.**

*For ages sixteen and older.*

Ken Weber's modern classic on performance is an important, enjoyable read. His advice is practical and in many cases easy to apply. He covers the nuts and bolts of real world performance, from microphone technique and voice training to eye contact and stage blocking. He illustrates his points with examples from well-known magicians<sup>11</sup>, and these examples of both the "do's" and "don'ts" remind us that even our heroes are human.

## Books or videos?

There are two kinds of magicians: video lovers and book lovers. It's a silly, futile debate between two creatures of habit. Generally, older magicians who grew up before the age of instructional video resent the medium, and the younger magicians who have access to inexpensive videos and DVDs find reading magic books too tedious.

The truth is that a combination of the two provides the optimum learning experience. There are certain concepts that must be gleaned from the printed page and other concepts that must be seen to be appreciated.

Character development and audience interaction are things you can only pick up from live performance footage. Similarly, timing and misdirection are two areas that are more easily gleaned from videos than the printed page.

There are also several video collections specializing in basic sleights, techniques, and effects. These are an excellent resource for a beginner because they provide a foundation on which to build. By learning exactly what the basics are supposed to look like, the student can then progress into more difficult, advanced handlings.

Many magicians see videos as problematic because they create magic clones. To a degree this is true, particularly with kids. Too many young, impressionable beginners perform the tricks from videos exactly as they are demonstrated. The result is an army of magic clones whose working knowledge is limited only to what they are spoon-fed on each viewing. But the solution to the problem isn't for you to dismiss the medium or avoid videos. Just be aware that you don't have to do tricks exactly as they are done for you. Use the tricks you learn as points of departure for your own experiments.

On the next page is a partial list of videos that will specifically benefit a younger magician (in alphabetical order).





### **Don Alan's Magic Ranch starring Don Alan.**

For my generation (and yours), these videos serve two functions. Not only do they display classic routines with great presentations and emotional hooks, but they showcase an era of television we missed by forty years. These videos are not instructional, but rather a collection of a television series for children. The premise of the show is a western-style ranch where the host, Don Alan, performs magic for the guests. You get to see classic acts and magicians (and these guest spots are a mixed bag). Each show also highlights a junior magician segment, where a young magician performs a trick; most of these spots should be self-esteem boosters for you or examples of what not to do. But most importantly, you get to see Don Alan, the original close-up magician, spin his effects over and over again. Pay close attention to how he routines interesting props and stories into a magical experience. The videos cost 100 dollars for the set.



### **Easy to Master Series starring Michael Ammar.**

Michael Ammar is arguably magic's greatest teacher. This series details cards (nine volumes), money (three volumes), and invisible thread (three volumes). These videos are professionally shot and edited, and there's always an enthusiastic audience responding. The material is culled from all the best books and magicians, and the magic is taught with an equal emphasis on technique and presentation. The cost is 35 dollars per DVD and they are available at all magic shops.



### **An Evening at the Tom Foolery starring Tom Mullica.**

My favorite magic video when I was a kid (and now) contains no explanations. Tom Mullica had a magic bar in Atlanta called the Tom-Foolery, and this video contains his entire bar-magic show. The video has poor production quality and the sound is funky, but it isn't noticeable because Tom is so engaging. He's part clown, part comedian, and all magic—and the combination is perfect. There is so much to observe here concerning routining, timing, and audience interaction. This is a perfect example of where footage of a subject is far more helpful than a book on the same subject (there is a book on Tom's magic, but it is of limited use to a younger performer because it details exclusively with bar magic). At only 20 dollars, this title should be at the top of your holiday wish list.

# Where and when should I perform?

Everywhere. And a lot.

Penn and Teller call it flight time, and you need as much of it as you can possibly arrange. You need to get as much time onstage or in front of spectators as you can. If possible, your audiences should be made up of strangers who won't be particularly easy on you (like Mom) or critical of you (like your brother). And just know now that the first show, like anything you do for the first time, is going to be awkward and full of mistakes. But that's okay, so long as you learn from them.

Before your first paying gigs come through, you should have plenty of performing experience. In addition to performing your act in front of anyone who will watch, you should participate in your local magic club's functions. This is a crowd of knowledgeable spectators who can watch your show critically and give you invaluable advice for next time.

You should also volunteer at schools, churches, orphanages, and retirement homes. Besides being an incredibly fulfilling and important civil service, you will gain experience here that you can't get anywhere else. The first retirement home I did was an eye opener. I said, "Now I need a volunteer to come onstage with me. Can I get some houselights, please?" The lights clicked on and I looked out into a sea of old people—every single one of them in a wheelchair. Not a single person could walk onstage! I had to adapt my show and think fast. Adaptation and thinking on your feet are two of the most important skills for a magician to have, so I'm glad I had this experience early on.

Before we move on, I'd like to bring up the all-important notion of risk. To experience the fullest thrills of performing magic, you must learn to take risks. The only way to develop truly funny, original lines in your show is to try them out. And the only way to know if that new trick will work is to give it a go. These early, experimental venues are the perfect times to take such risks.

Al Goshman, the legendary close-up magician, ends his book humbly, like this: "magic...you have also given me some moments of pain and defeat for performances that were much less than I had hoped for. For all of those moments, I thank you."

## Can I get girls with magic?

People get into magic for different reasons, and I have known plenty of guys who learned magic expressly to meet women. Most of them aren't involved anymore (with magic, that is), and those who stayed with the craft have altered their objectives. I have yet to meet any females who got interested in magic as a way of meeting men—it seems young women understand the limits of magic tricks better than most young men.

So guys, let's talk. The truth is that magic is not a way to meet women. If you think that finding a selected card is your ticket to tonsil hockey, be prepared to spend many nights alone practicing card tricks (which, to be honest, sounds pretty good to me).

But magic is an excellent tool in the dating game, because it is both a fascinating hobby and because of the skills it provides you with. A good magician is a confident person, a person who mingles effortlessly, and a person with a quick wit. These qualities are rare in adults; they are almost nonexistent in teenagers. Rest assured, magic has provided you with skills far more powerful than linking rings or vanishing quarters.

### **Come on. Is that really your answer?**

So your urge to use your powers to meet people is overwhelming. Here's another cold, hard fact: I think magic is a *terrible* icebreaker. For this you have all the bad magicians in the world to blame.

News flash: magicians aren't universally perceived as cool. There are just too many reckless, old (and young) magicians mistreating their audiences out there. If you approach a stranger and ask her to pick a card, it's likely that she will be less concerned with your magic and more concerned with her exit route.

Instead, magic works extremely well as an Ace in your sleeve. Be charming, be funny, ask questions—and when the topic circulates to your interests, mention magic. “No, not MU-sician, MA-gician,” you'll say. “Yeah, I actually do magic.”

Invariably she will ask to see a trick. Your answer should be: “Yeah, later I can show you something.” Only when your audiences (or your friends) are truly interested should you pull out the magic. This makes the experience special.



# Should I perform magic at school?

*“No one who does magic in high school has ever gotten a girlfriend.”*

*—Penn Jillette, Cruel Tricks for Dear Friends*

The more you study magic, the more you’ll discover that the magic moment—that moment of pure astonishment—is special. And when you start transmitting that moment to other people in your own tricks, you realize it isn’t just special, it’s sacred. And sacred is hard to accomplish between classes.

The truth is that school is the best and worst place to do magic. Kids love magic, but kids are also jealous of other kids. When you do something your friends don’t understand, it’s likely they will react negatively.

But you can find positive outlets for your magic in school. Talent shows, fundraisers, and after-school programs are always looking for entertainment, and in these environments you will be the star of the show.

But every children’s magician knows that teenagers are, by their very nature, allergic to magic! You would be hard-pressed to find magicians who cater to this age group. It’s an awkward age for everyone—an age when you don’t like to be fooled or put on the spot or outdone by anyone else. So my advice to junior high and high school magicians...go easy on the tricks for your friends.

But here’s the great news: school is a great *resource* for your magic. The drama department should be your local hang. Glean everything you can about stage lighting, set design, and theater-speak; you’ll need all this information at your next show.

I arranged with my drama teacher to have our class help design the set for a show I was doing. Mrs. Magistro got a chance to teach real world set design to her class, and Joshua Jay got a free, painted backdrop.

## Andi Gladwin on performing magic at school

Andi Gladwin was turning heads in the magic community when he was a teenager. But like the rest of us, he had to grapple with magic in school. Here are his thoughts on the subject.

I was a nerd at school. I was that kid who taught my IT teachers about computers and wrote my own medical excuses to get out of gym class (but contrary to rumors that have been circulating, I did not carry a briefcase in school; I wasn't *that* kid).

Regardless of my apparent social defect, people still wanted to hang out with "the magician." My friends would joke that it would take me an hour to walk across the school because so many people wanted to see magic. Magic accelerated the development of my social skills (you heard that right: a nerd with social skills) and created opportunities for me to meet people outside of my usual circle of friends. I often performed for small groups, but occasionally I would gather a crowd of 100 kids or more. I was the Pied Piper of the playground, and that felt great.

All that changed in a day. One of my teachers put a school-wide ban on playing cards because she thought they were the handiwork of the devil. I politely explained that they were the handiwork of the United States Playing Card Company, but that didn't change her mind. She must have confiscated twenty of my decks that month.

As it turns out, the ban was a blessing in disguise. I began to adapt my style to magic with found objects. I learned to do tricks with everything in sight: pens, paper, rubber bands, textbooks, and shoelaces. Over time, the school realized the positive sides of my magic and lifted the ban. I performed at many school events and the school even started to hire me for external functions. By the time I was 16, I was performing a full illusion act with three gorgeous assistants.

So through magic in school, I learned social skills as well as the importance of using your surroundings in magic. And, at least in this story, the nerd even gets the girls!



## How do I handle hecklers?

*“You can’t please all of the people all of the time, and last night all those people were at my show.”*

—Mitch Hedberg

Being young makes you more susceptible to hecklers. Obnoxious people are less intimidated by a young magician because they can’t separate your skill level from your age. “She’s young and she’s doing magic; she can’t be very good.”

But when a magician asks me how I handle hecklers, my first reaction is to tell that magician that it’s not the right question. Even as a young magician, if people are interrupting the flow of your show on a regular basis, it is likely due to something you are doing. Let’s see if we can pinpoint some “don’ts” to help eliminate those pesky hecklers.

**DON’T** be rude to your audience or perform tricks where you challenge spectators. Comments like “You’re not paying attention,” or “Wrong, the ball is under this cup,” or “See if you can catch me on this one,” are lines I hope will die out with the old magicians who use them.

**DON’T** perform in situations where your audience doesn’t want to see you. If someone asks to see an effect over dinner but it’s clear that everyone else at the table couldn’t care less...save the trick for another time.

**DON’T** encourage negative feedback. Hecklers feed on the attention you give them, so don’t give them any.

## Where is the line?

We've talked about how important it is for your magic to reflect your life. And it's critical that you be yourself onstage. It's a natural outgrowth, then, to push the boundaries of what you can get away with. And since dating is on your mind and the f-bomb is on the tip of your tongue, it's tempting to do off-color magic. Resist this temptation.

I remember seeing the Amazing Jonathan slay an audience with dirty magic, and every time he said a four-letter word, the crowd cheered. Jonathan is a comedic genius, to be sure, but I had to realize that I wasn't the Amazing Jonathan, and I don't perform in a Las Vegas Lounge.

Suggestive material is offensive when it comes from a younger performer. Some people like crude humor, but nobody wants to hear it from a minor. Here's the rule: if the trick would get you into trouble at the dinner table, don't do it!

I even discovered certain words that affected the impact of my magic. Particularly with kids, there are certain words that suggest a harsh or negative emotion; they aren't "bad" words but they sound bad. Even if you're describing a prop or action, you should substitute "STUPID," "DUMB," and "UGLY" for words like "SILLY" or "CRAZY."

I'm not suggesting you don't tell dirty jokes or use four-letter words—it wasn't so long ago that I was fifteen years old. But I am suggesting you reserve that material for the locker room, and keep it clean onstage.

Joel Ward's act is filled with original, edgy material, and here he offers us some insight into the advantages of being young.

Being a young magician allows you to do things adult magician wouldn't be able to get away with. More than any other time in your life, audiences are accepting of you and your interests. What do you like? Do you play sports? Do you like chess? Take these elements and implement them into your magic. Most people like to watch young, individualistic people succeed. Use this momentum and try out new material. Some of it won't work, but some of it will. And that makes it all worthwhile.



## Egos?

Magic is about managing egos—yours, your audience's, and how both your ego and your audience's egos are affected by your magic. I'm not speaking exclusively about your getting a big head (though let's not go that route). I'm talking about the larger problem that results from being young and good, which is this: people will project a big ego onto you.

Whether from a group of jealous friends or older magicians, the very sight of you doing magic (and doing it artfully) at a young age is threatening to sensitive egos. And since magic requires more than a little self-confidence in both the way you present your effects and yourself, this is easily misinterpreted as cocky.

What can we do to curb this bitter jealousy? Not much. The only ego you have control over is your own. So... be extra polite during your shows, don't show off, and stay far away from material that challenges the audience.

You'll still hear things and get the occasional hostile comment, but here's a secret you can take comfort in: all that jealousy is about how good you are. It's a compliment in disguise! Just don't let that go to your head.

## David Oliver on watching magic shows



Never sit in an audience shuffling, or practicing with a deck of cards (or any other prop). And don't whisper during the show to explain your thoughts on methods, routining, etc. Talk after the show or at home where there's no chance of non-magicians hearing you and learning any magic secrets.

Also, don't forget to act just like every other audience member. Don't take notes during a performance and definitely applaud, laugh and smile. Never try and force the magician to pick you as a volunteer over a non-magician audience member. It's better for the magician to have an unsuspecting volunteer, rather than someone like you, who may not react to the surprises. Sit in the back, relax, and watch how the magician handles "real people" and learn from it. Respect their experience.

To meet the magician, wait until the show is finished, and all of the other audience members have left. Don't assume that it's okay to go backstage without permission. Be careful how you introduce yourself. Wait off to the side, away from any ongoing conversation. When the magician is not busy, approach and introduce yourself. Ask if they have time for a conversation and say that you are someone who's learning to be a magician. Technically, you are still a "magician in training" as there are no "Professional Magicians" at your age (sorry egos). Remember, respect equals respect.

# Should I enter a magic competition?

Magic competitions are neither helpful nor harmful in and of themselves. I've seen awesomely bad acts win and completely original acts lose. I've seen a crooked magic competition and I once saw a guy slap a judge's wife because he lost. But I've also seen magicians use magic competitions to hone and then debut new acts that eventually earned them worldwide acclaim and bookings. (Wouldn't magic competitions make for scandalous reality television?)

There are three good reasons to compete and as many not to. Let's look at both.

## Reasons to Compete

**Unique feedback:** Magic competitions are typically decided by a panel of judges, and afterward their notes and scores are available to competitors. These judges range from extremely knowledgeable to absolutely clueless, but taken as a whole, you will find lots of helpful suggestions. And, magic competitions are performed before an audience of...magicians! So ask around afterward for feedback from anyone and everyone you see.

## Danny Cole on competitions

Danny Cole is certainly qualified to comment on magic competitions: he won first place at the Desert Magic Seminar (which led to a memorable television appearance on a Lance Burton special). In 1999 the Academy of Magical Arts honored Danny for "Outstanding Junior Achievement," and he was awarded "Rising Star of Magic" on the World Magic Awards Television Special.



### So, Danny, what did you learn from competing in magic?

Doing well in competition was a sort of validation of my skills and an encouragement to continue down the path to becoming a professional. They also provided me with opportunities to perform on real stages—beautiful theaters sometimes—in front of large audiences that I wouldn't otherwise have been able to perform for. Not only did these experiences teach me about proper timing and routining, but they are also the only way to learn to work through real problems that occur during live performance.

Magic competitions are also a showcase for the newest trends in magic. Many of the newest and freshest magical ideas come from contestants; it's a great time to find inspiration.

**Incentive to Complete Your Act:** Competitions can serve as motivation to stay focused on a new act. Many magicians use competition dates for their debut: “I want to have a stage act ready for an audience by the magic competition on April 18th.”

**Resume Builder:** Winning a magic competition gives you “bragging rights” for life—and by that I mean that you can use the byline “Champion of Magic at the Columbus Magi-Fest Invitational” on your promotional materials forever. The big secret here is that no layman on the planet knows or cares what, specifically you won. They won’t be able to tell the difference between a FISM championship and your local club’s annual contest. All magic competitions sound about the same on paper, and this works to your advantage (provided you win one).

**International Bookings:** I realized quite early on that even the successful professionals don’t get to travel to exotic countries for shows—they’re too busy doing work in their own regions. If you have aspirations to perform in far-away places, the magic community can provide this. Winning the World Magic Seminar in 1998 was like someone handing me a free ticket to Japan, Australia, France, Iceland, Argentina, and many other places I could never have imagined visiting. If you create a unique, award-winning act, you will be able to exhibit it all over the world.

### Reasons not to Compete

**Money:** Magic competitions generally offer prize money equivalent to one or two show fees. And the amount of work required for a competition is months of daily practice. From a work/reward standpoint, this is one of the most inefficient ways to earn money.

**To Practice:** Some magicians advocate a magic competition as a place to ease in a new routine, but I take offense to this. Magic competitions are performed in front of a group of magicians who are paid to watch. This is not the place to stumble through experimental fodder. If you compete, compete to win. Come prepared.

**Because you’re competitive:** It is my belief that magic competitions provide an invaluable forum for advancing the art of magic. That said, there are people in magic who compete compulsively, year in and year out, anywhere and everywhere. Yet ultimately—and ironically—their careers go nowhere. People like this remind me of a basketball teammate in grade school, Brian, who was simply obsessed with being better than everyone. He reveled in “bests”—the best sneakers, the best team, the best scorer, etc. He



sometimes was the best, and his dresser was covered in trophies.

But you know what? I couldn't stand Brian. And neither could anyone else.

Participating in a competition takes an iron will and steel chops. If you do compete, I have but one piece of advice for you. Avoid a "competition act." This is industry jargon for an act that has no practicality in the real world and is designed only for use in front of magicians.

These acts sometimes have a silly theme and involve producing lots of objects along this theme for no rhyme or reason. And rather than forming an act with a natural build, a beginning, middle, and end, competition acts are often packed with only the kind of technical magic that judges will appreciate. These acts are often awarded at magic competitions but rarely ever exhibited elsewhere. I mean, what layman wants to watch eight minutes of soap-bar manipulation or ten matrix handlings with Ritz crackers? Competitions should be a launching pad for new and exciting material, not an end goal for a magician's magician.

### David Parr on magic competitions

David Parr, author of *Brain Food* and coauthor of *The Magic Mirror*, offers a different perspective on magic competitions.

**Josh:** My understanding is that you think magic competitions are counterproductive. Why?

**David:** In my view, magic is a performing art — it's a form of creative expression. And competitions bring with them some qualities that aren't especially helpful to people who are trying grow and discover new territory in an art form. If my goal is to learn and grow, to stretch my creative abilities, to strengthen the skills I have and to work toward discovering and developing new ones, my energies should probably not be directed toward pleasing a panel of judges who don't necessarily have my best interests at heart.





## David Parr continued

**Josh:** What do you mean by “best interests”?

**David:** I mean my continued growth and learning in this art form. The thing I’ve noticed over the years is that judges of competitions tend to reward acts that conform to accepted models of expression — the acts that most closely resemble what has been accepted in the past or what is currently trendy are the ones that win. If what I want is to innovate, to try new ideas and stretch my abilities, then my efforts are better directed toward learning and creative experimentation, not toward trying to anticipate what a set of authority figures will like.

But there’s a bigger problem. Among the most difficult obstacles for any creative person to overcome are judgment and comparison. I didn’t really get over this hurdle until I was almost thirty years old. When I compared myself and my work to magicians I really admired, I felt inadequate, defeated. It seemed as if I could never create or accomplish anything as great as what they had done; I could never be what they were. Eventually, I realized that I had to stop comparing myself to anyone — stop judging myself by comparison — or I would never discover what I am capable of creating and accomplishing. Competitions are about judgment and comparison. Getting caught up in that kind of thinking can be a major obstacle to creativity.

**Josh:** What would you recommend to someone who wants to learn and grow without entering magic competitions?

**David:** Encourage your local magic clubs and conventions to set up Works in Progress sessions, or set them up among your friends in magic. During a Works in Progress session, you can share work that is unfinished, untested, in need of direction or refinement, or just plain stuck and not progressing, and then receive written suggestions and observations from everyone in the room. I’ve helped to organize many Works in Progress sessions with my friends and, after every session, I’ve ended up with noticeable improvements to my magic. It’s the best way I know to foster growth and learning in this art.

# Can you teach me a trick?

Sure. Most magic books written for young people are not written for young performers. Most of them assume you have no prior skill or experience, and this can be frustrating if you're serious about magic. I chose two basic sleights that you can use every day, and each one in a different context. I've provided a basic but impressive trick that uses each of these sleights, so you can see how they are applied in performance. Then I've provided two performance pieces: "Flashcards" and "Inflated Transposition." Each one contains a patter theme appropriate for a young performer. The effect, method, and presentation are geared toward a young but serious magician.

Under, Over

# The False Transfer

You place an object into your hand. Then, it's gone. It's simple, elegant, and a pathway to many situational tricks. Offer your friend a piece of gum...and make it disappear before he can take it. There's a rock in your shoe. Remove it, show it, and make it disappear...and reappear inside someone else's shoe. Make a sugar packet penetrate a table. Change a carrot into a potato chip.

All of these effects pivot around versions of the false transfer. There are as many handlings of the vanish as there are action figures in a toy store, but the one taught here is among the easiest and most versatile. It doesn't rely on the classic palm at all, and unlike other handlings, this version is not limited to coins or flat objects. You can use it in conjunction with Cups and Balls, or improvise with objects like pen caps or dog biscuits.

Begin by displaying an object, say a bottle cap, in your right hand. The right hand is palm up and the object should rest along the base of the right fingers (photo 1). Notice that the right thumb rests along the base of the right first finger. Above all else, remember to keep the right hand relaxed throughout the sleight. Your eyes should focus intently on the bottle cap in your right hand. Even your body should be turned slightly, favoring the right side. A good way to do this is to shift all your body's weight to your right foot.

The hands, eyes, and body will work together as the cap is apparently transferred to the left hand. Actually, the right hand will retain the cap. To perform the sequence, both hands move toward each other at waist height. As the right hand moves, it turns palm down. During this wrist action, the right thumb moves into the right hand





and pins the cap into place (photo 2). The right thumb's action is slow, soft, and well-covered by the larger movement of the right arm. The spectators will be unable to see the right thumb's action because the hand is turned palm down.

As this happens, the left hand turns palm up as if receiving the cap from the right hand. At precisely the moment the right palm is parallel to the floor, it should contact the palm up left hand. The left middle finger pad should contact (but not take) the cap pinned in the right hand (photo 3).

The left hand now retracts toward the left. As it moves away from the right hand, the left fingers and thumb are clenched together gently. Don't make a fist here; just cup the fingers together (photo 4). As the left hand moves, the left wrist rotates the hand palm down slightly.

As the bottle cap is apparently taken in the left hand, the eyes follow the left fingers intently. No attention is paid to the right hand now; the action of the right hand must seem unimportant. Even your body



language indicates where the cap should be. As the left hand takes the cap, your weight should shift to your left foot, and you may wish to turn the body slightly in the direction of the left hand.

A split second after the left hand has begun its course to the left or toward a spectator, the right hand will retract to your side. The right hand should simply “drop” to your side. Swing your limp right arm once or twice, moving the arm only at the shoulder.

Still focusing attention on the left hand, crumple the fingers together and open the left hand to show the bottle cap has disappeared.

# Breathless

Here's an immediate application of the false transfer. You'll cause a breath mint to disappear...twice. This effect is perfect in the lobby of a restaurant or hotel where there's a large bowl of mints or candy. The effect is completely impromptu.

Call attention to the mint bowl and remove one with your right hand (photo 1). Display the mint at the base of the right fingers and then execute the false transfer (photos 2, 3 & 4). After showing the mint gone from the left hand, offer to repeat the effect. Keeping the right hand's mint concealed, reach back into the bowl with the right hand. You'll apparently extract another mint. Actually, you'll leave the palmed mint back in the bowl (it will blend perfectly with the others). Clench the right fingers and thumb together, as if gripping another mint. Actually, the right hand takes nothing this time.



Remove the right hand from the bowl, staring intently at the right fingers. This time you can move even slower and more deliberately than the first time, both because the spectators will be watching you more carefully and because the method this time (no mint at all) is different than the first time (a false transfer).

Pretend to place the right hand's mint into the left fingers. Here, you'll simulate the actions of actually placing an object in the left hand, which should also match identically the actions of the false transfer. The right thumb plays no part this time because there is nothing to retain in the right hand. It's all a bluff!

The eyes focus intently on the left hand as the left fingers clench around what appears to be a mint. Move the left hand away from the right and then cause the second mint to disappear. Now, both hands can be displayed empty. Close by saying, *"And do you know where the mints went?"* Gesture with your hands toward your mouth. Smack your lips together a few times and add, *"And I've got the fresh breath to prove it!"*



# The false transfer in action



# The Cross Cut Force

Originally titled the Crisscross force, this wonderful move was invented by Max Holden<sup>12</sup>. This force has a nice “hands off” feel to it, and you’ll be able to perform it immediately.

Place the force card on top. Place the deck on the table and invite the spectator to cut the cards by lifting off about half the deck (photo 1). Take the cut-off portion from the spectator and place it on the table to the right of the bottom half.

*“To mark the place you cut,” you say, “I’ll place the other portion across the packet.”* So saying, replace the bottom half of the deck on top of the upper portion, crosswise (photo 2).

Now comes the all-important time misdirection. That is, a few moments must transpire where the focus is on something other than the cards. Perhaps you’ll explain what is about to transpire. You might ask the spectator if she had the option to cut anywhere in the pack. Maybe you’ll tell a joke. The focus must shift away from the pack, if only for ten seconds.



12. See “The New Knife and Selected Cards,” *The Magical Monthly*, vol. 2, no. 10, July 1925, pg. 199.



Call attention back to the deck and lift the upper, crossed portion of cards (which is actually the bottom half of the deck). "*This is the card you cut to,*" you say as you lift the top card of the lower packet off the table and hand it to the spectator. While it looks like this card comes from the center of the deck, this is actually the force card. If you would like to restore the deck to its original order, simply place the tabled packet on top of the packet in your hand.

# Call The Wizard

When the magician fails to find a selected card, he can always count on his friend, "The Wizard." The spectator is invited to look up "Wizard" in the magician's cell phone directory. He makes the call...and a real wizard answers! Over the phone, the wizard divines the name of the selection.

The workings of the trick are simple. You will force a predetermined card, and a friend will name it over the phone. Your friend will program your cellular phone number into his directory. Whenever you call from this phone, he must agree to answer as a wizard...no matter what. He must also agree to name the force card, the Seven of Diamonds.

To perform, simply force the Seven of Diamonds via your favorite method (you could use the Cross Cut force, taught already). Make several failed attempts at finding the card ("Was this it? No? How about this one?")

*"When I can't find a selection," you say, "sometimes I have to ask the wizard."* Take out your cell phone and hand it to the spectator. Help guide her to your directory and allow her to scroll down to the 'W's. Press "send" on the wizard's number.

Now it's up to your friend to reveal the card. Hopefully, he'll be animated and eccentric, like this: *"William the Wizard's Office, specializing in locating lost socks and homogenizing homework. Even though we've never met, I'm guessing you're thinking of a card right now. Am I right? Don't interrupt! Of course, I'm right. I'm William the Wizard! Now then, you're thinking of a red card, a Diamond...the Seven of Diamonds! I would love to stay on and chat, but someone's here with a toad and I have to figure out how to get the poor lad back into a child again."*

# Inflated Transposition

The magician offers to recreate a trick he saw by a Brazilian magician. The Brazilian magician used reais instead of dollars, but the magician offers to present the trick in American currency.

He presents a dollar bill and asks to borrow a five-dollar note from the spectator. Both bills are examined, folded into eighths, and placed inside the spectator's fist. The magician removes his dollar bill and then changes it into the spectator's five-dollar bill—half of a transposition. But when the spectator opens her hand, instead of the magician's dollar bill, she discovers the exact real note the Brazilian magician used.

I developed this routine by accident. I studied several handlings of U.F. Grant's marketed "Slow Motion Bill Change" (*Tarbell Course in Magic Volume 3*, 1927). For a time I used Eugene Burger's "Slow Motion Bill Change" (*The Craft of Magic*, 1984). Then I learned David Parr's "Slow Motion Swindle" (*Brain Food*, 1998) and then Roger Klause's "Ultimate Slow Motion Bill Transposition." Every version I liked involved prepared notes. In time I developed a version that used only a duplicate, folded dollar bill. I felt it accomplished the same effect as other versions and even allowed for some interesting displays. I used the handling often because it only required two of the same note, which I had in my wallet virtually all the time.

I once intended to perform the trick but found I didn't have two of the same denomination—I hadn't yet broken a hundred-dollar bill. On a whim, I used it anyway, loading the hundred-dollar bill in the spectator's hand instead of a duplicate single. The reaction was stronger because the effect now contained the important element of the transposition (the first half) and a satisfying surprise.

I realize that it's not always possible or desirable to carry a hundred-dollar bill with you, especially when you're young. So, I eventually changed the surprise bill to a foreign note. Brazilian money is particularly colorful and durable, but any foreign bill will work. You can obtain colorful foreign money in any coin shop, and often the notes are quite cheap.

The effect pivots around a strange “Z” fold I devised, which I later learned was created by Dr. Raymond L. Beebe (*Hugard’s Magic Monthly*, March, 1963). He prepared the folded bills ahead of time in his “Paper Money Switch” but was the first to eliminate the need for gaffed currency during a bill transposition.

The strange effect of a transposition plus surprise ending certainly isn’t new. I can think of several card effects that employ this type of thinking. With money, Francis Carlyle was a pioneer who devised a handling for the silver-dollar sized penny, a novelty popular in the late 1960s. In that effect, he would place a penny and a silver dollar in the spectator’s fist. He removed the penny and changed it to a silver dollar. The spectator, who expected to find a penny in her hand, discovered quite a surprise—a penny the size of a silver dollar. This is simply that premise adapted to borrowed bills.

## Setup

You’ll need a dollar bill and a surprise bill. The third bill, which can be of any denomination, is borrowed. Pre-fold both bills in the following way. Hold the bill with the face toward you, and fold it in eighths as follows (all folds will be away from you). Fold the right half to the left (photo 1), then fold the right half to the left again (photo 2). Finally, fold the bottom half of the bill up (photo 3). Repeat this sequence with both bills.

The setup for the trick is quite easy and can be done on the fly. You can also store the folded bills in your wallet so you’re ready at a moment’s notice. Begin with the Brazilian note folded as described and tucked inside the one-dollar bill, which is folded only in half (photo 4, next page).



### Performance

*"People ask me about the greatest magic trick I've ever seen. I'll tell you about it. A Brazilian magician did it for me. I don't know his name or how he did the trick. All I remember is that it was incredible. I've recreated it as best I can. He used reais, the currency in Brazil, but I'll use dollars."* Remove the single from your pocket. You can show all sides of the single as long as it remains folded. The folded reai will remain concealed in the fold.

*"He borrowed a bill from someone else, so can I borrow a bill?"*

Ask to borrow a bill from the spectator. While she removes a bill from her wallet, open the single, pinning the real to the back of the bill with the right thumb (photo 5). Let's assume she produces a five. *"The Brazilian magician allowed me to fold his bill and he folded mine. This way, I knew everything was legit."* Take the spectator's bill in your left hand, taking care that you grip the bill so the president's face is toward you.

Extend your right second finger and insert the spectator's bill between the first and second fingers of the right hand (photo 6). It is now an easy matter for the left hand to grip the single and slide it from between the right fingers. The hidden real will automatically shift against the spectator's bill. Hand the left hand's single to the spectator and ask her to fold it as per your instructions.

Now you'll fold her bill as you folded yours. That is, you'll fold the bill in half, folding the left end away from you. During this process the foreign note is concealed behind the bill.





Now you'll fold the left side to the right again (photo 7). As this happens the right thumb must shift the real behind the left fingers. You'll notice in the photograph that the bill overlaps onto the left fingers considerably. This allows for a pristine, thin edge along the right side of the spectator's bill.

Verbally guide the spectator through the simple folding process (into fourths), taking care that she folds the bill with the president's face on the outside.

Shift the spectator's bill back to your right hand, secretly shifting the concealed real so that it overlaps the bill onto the right fingers (photo 8). Take the single from the spectator and situate it in front of the borrowed bill, downjogged for exactly half its length (photo 9). As this happens, make sure the indices face you. Take this time to situate the real squarely behind the other bills (photo 10). The packet's thickness isn't so critical here because there are two bills.



You'll now execute a sort of "Z" fold I devised, which renders two bills double-sided (so that one side shows a single and the other side displays a five). The actions are bold but the fold doesn't look peculiar. I have found it goes unnoticed by even skeptical audience members. Simply fold the spectator's bill forward and down, overlapping the single (photo 11). Then fold the single forward and up, over the upper portion of the spectator's bill (photo 12). Two "V" folds are now inserted into each other while the folded real remains concealed behind.



Ask the spectator to extend her right hand, palm up. Place all the bills onto her fingers. It's important that the bills are placed onto the fingers and not the palm. Pin the bills to her fingers with your right hand, placing the real against her fingers where it will remain out of view. Ask her to close her hand but keep your fingers against her palm as she closes. This automatically turns the packet of bills over—it happens in the natural action of closing the fingers against the palm. Remove your fingers from her hand and ask her to turn her wrist palm down. This rotates the packet of bills again so the real is lowermost.



*"The Brazilian magician reached into my hand and removed his bill."* So saying, reach into her closed fist and gently remove both the single and the five. The fold allows both bills to be removed together, and they will look like just one bill. Since the spectator still feels a folded note inside her fist she will not suspect you are removing two bills.

Hold the packet between the fingers and thumb at chest height. Shake the hand in an up and down motion, rotating the packet over while shaking right hand. The turnover should be concealed in the blur of motion. The spectator's bill will now be visible to the audience.

*"The bills have changed places! If I've got your bill... what bill must be in your hand?"* As you talk you'll unfold the

spectator's bill. Since the focus reverts back to the spectator's hand (and not on the changed bill in your hand) there is no undue heat on the unfolding process.

To unfold the spectator's bill, grip your single between the thumb and left fingers. Rotate the spectator's bill 90 degrees counterclockwise and insert the right fingers into the opening along the right side (photo 13). The one-dollar bill slides under the right thumb and unfolds into fourths as the spectator's bill is unfolded completely (photo 14). The single remains concealed behind the spectator's bill.

The spectator is instructed to open her hand. Instead of a transposition, she discovers a Real note. Ask her to unfold it. *"Wait! That's exactly the bill the Brazilian magician used when he showed the trick to me!"* Take the foreign note back and insert it between the right first and second fingers. You'll slip the concealed single behind the real as you remove the spectator's bill from the right hand using exactly the same method described at the beginning of the trick. Pocket the real note (and the folded single) to conclude.





# Flashcards

*"Let me tell you about how I got a detention for doing magic," says the young magician. "My school has lots of rules, and one of them is that playing cards are forbidden. To get around this, I drew my own deck of cards, cleverly disguised on the other side of these note cards." So saying, the magician presents a stack of lined note cards (photo 1). Speeches, notes, and highlighted vocabulary fill out the fronts of the cards, but the back of each note card has a picture of a different playing card (photo 2).*

*"I used to do tricks with my homemade deck of cards for kids in school...like this. Let me show you one I used to do in school all the time. Please call stop as I riffle through the note cards." The spectator complies and remembers the stopped-at card. The magician instructs the spectator to close her right hand into a fist. The magician inserts note cards one by one between the spectator's clenched thumb and first finger. About twenty cards are inserted in a haphazard fashion (photo 3). "I'm going to try and hit the stack of cards and cause the one you chose to fall from your hand," the magician proclaims.*

He strikes the note cards in the spectator's hands. Surprisingly, all the note cards fall from her hand. More surprisingly, a real playing card is left in her hand, still clenched between the fingers...her selected card. *"But as I told you, there are no playing cards in school, and that's why I got a detention!"*



## Setup

You'll need 52 note cards, one playing card, and a rubber band. While you can use new note cards, it will appear more authentic if you recycle old ones from past presentations or speeches. On the blank side of each card, draw a picture of a playing card. The drawings should be unrealistic—the more homemade, the better. Draw a different card on each note card.

The playing card will be the force card. Suppose it's the Six of Hearts. Remove any note card (except the Six of Hearts note card) and trim the outer right corner of the card slightly with scissors (photo 4). You have just created a short note card. Remove the Six of Hearts note card and place it on top of the short note card, and then place both of these cards, together, in the middle of the stack. When you riffle the outer right corner from the bottom to the top, it will be an easy matter to stop at the short card. The very next note card is the Six of Hearts...which you'll force.

The final preparation is to set the real Six of Hearts second from the bottom, face down. Wrap a rubber band around the stack to keep everything together (and to keep the playing card from falling out).

## Performance

*"Let me tell you about how I got a detention for doing magic,"* you begin. *"My school has lots of rules, and one of them is that playing cards are forbidden. To get around this, I drew my own deck of cards, cleverly disguised on the other side of these note cards."* Remove the rubber band from your stack and spread over the top few note cards, turning each one over to display different cards.

*"I used to do tricks with my homemade deck of cards for kids in school...like this. Let me show you one I used to do in school all the time. Please call stop as I riffle through the note cards."* Square the cards in your left hand and regrip them by pinching the inner



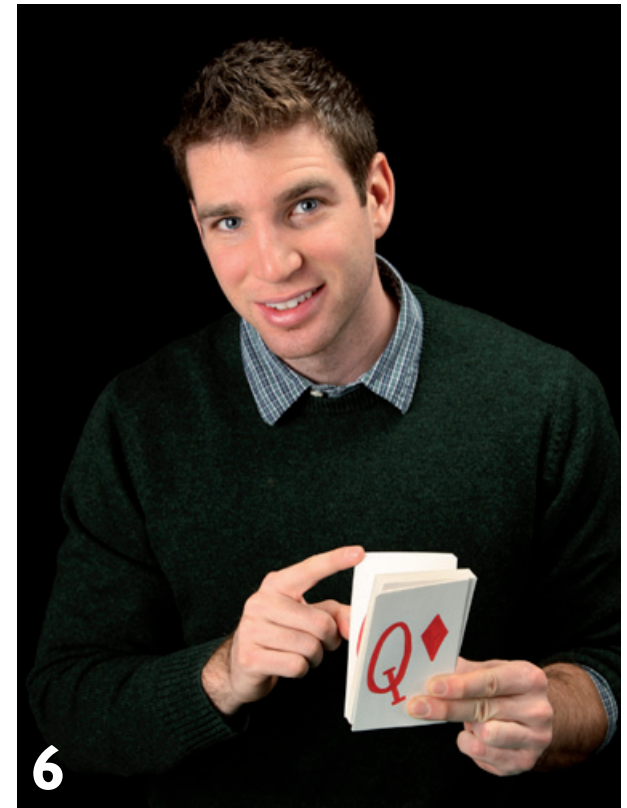
left corner between the left thumb and fingers (photo 5, previous page). Run your right first finger along the outer right corner of the deck, moving from the face to the back. As the spectator calls stop, continue riffing until you feel a click. The click is your short card. This force takes timing but isn't difficult. You must learn to simply ignore the spectator and always stop on the short card.

Break the pack at this point by pulling back with the right first finger, allowing the spectator to see the Six of Hearts drawing (photo 6). Keep hold of this packet with your left fingers. Once the spectator has noted her card, remove the right first finger, allowing all the cards to coalesce. If you like, you can add a false shuffle or cut at this point.

*"Please make a fist with your hands."* Gesture with your own right hand by curling the fingers into a fist, taking care that the thumb remains extended on top of the right first finger (photo 7).

Now cut off about 40 note cards from the stack and place them on the table or in your pocket, commenting that you won't need the whole pack for the trick. Tuck each of the remaining cards under the spectator's thumb pad. You should make a disorganized fan of cards, letting some protrude from the right and left, placing cards under, over, and between the others. Stop when you have exactly two note cards left in your hand (and the real Six of Hearts between them).

Take the bottom note card from your left hand with your



6



7

right fingers, taking care not to expose the Six of Hearts. This leaves one note card in your left hand with the Six beneath it. Insert the cards in each hand under the spectator's thumb at the same time, but do it like this: the right hand inserts its note card on top of the stack as the left hand inserts the note card and the Six, as one card, under all the other note cards. The spectator won't feel two cards because of all the other cards she is holding. You must make sure that the Six of Hearts is the lowermost card in her hand (photo 8).

Say, "I'm going to try to hit the stack of cards and cause the one you chose to fall from your hand." Now firmly slap the cards in the spectator's hand (photo 9). Your hand should be palm down and your fingers spread. Upon impact, all the note cards will fall from the spectator's hands, leaving only a face-down playing card protruding from her fist.

*"Wait a minute! That's a real playing card. What was the name of the card you selected? The Six of Hearts? Turn it over..."* The spectator will be impressed at both the appearance of a card and that you found her selection. *"But as I told you, there are no playing cards in school, and that's why I got a detention!"*





# What's the difference between "young" and "youth"?

This book has been about making your age work for you rather than against you, but this is a temporary issue. You will eventually get older. But just because you aren't young doesn't mean you can't think youthfully. Your inquisitive mind is an asset; don't ever lose it.

Quick story: I performed magic in Ecuador for a group of young magicians who don't have access to DVDs or books or even decent teachers. One boy had a thumb tip but clearly nobody had showed him how to use it. And without instructions to limit his imagination, the boy had constructed an entire routine wherein he vanished and manipulated his fingers. I was astounded! This was a totally original routine with a prop I was sure had been fully explored. But he turned the "secret" gimmick on its head and used it in plain sight to great effect. He was thinking youthfully, and it was inspiring.

I work with young magicians like you a lot and I get as much from it as you do (writing this book, for example, has been quite a learning experience). The reason I get so much from

Andi Gladwin, now 25, was performing and publishing original magic as a teenager, and I thought he could speak to the creative mindset of someone in your age bracket.



**Andi, can you speak about the creative process as a young magician?**

The most creative time in my life (so far) was when I was a teenager. While I didn't realize it at the time, being a young magician gave me a massive creative advantage: I could just play. I didn't let anything get in the way of my ideas. The result of this play was some of my most interesting and creative magic.

It's harder now; my mind goes to overdrive on whether an idea has been thought of before, whether or not it's possible to achieve a method, whether it's structurally sound and whether Jay Sankey has invented it yet. I can't help doing this—it just happened as I got older.

working with young magicians is because you have a fresh way of looking at things that older magicians don't often possess. Perhaps they did when they were young, but it faded as they got older.

You live in a world without constraints or limits—I remember what that felt like. Whenever I work on new material I try to tap into the mindset that you are fortunate enough to exist in all the time.

So as you progress in magic and cross from *Under* to *Over*, keep your head in the clouds.

Under, Over

## Introduction to *Over*

So your child is a magician. Congratulations! He or she will soon be spending lots of time performing, practicing, or thinking about magic. Guess what? You will, too. How you do *your* job will be as important as how well he or she performs magic.

It's a daunting responsibility. But it's also an amazing opportunity for you to bond with your child. In the pages that follow, I'll answer all the questions flashing through your mind and put your fears at ease. Take a breath. This is actually a really cool art.

Magic provides some important skill sets for your child. He or she will be reading, practicing, problem solving, building props, and interacting with adults, all in pursuit of a good performance. Your child will learn advanced public speaking skills and attain a level of confidence in front of people most *adults* wished they possessed. When your child starts performing, he will quickly learn the value of a dollar, how to manage money, and how to manage a small business. And as of this moment, your dinner parties will have a headlining magician, free of charge.

Magic has been my obsession since I was seven, and I owe a huge part of my success to the unflinching support of my mom and dad. Each one had different roles and both played an equally important part in my development. I feel terrible whenever I see kids who are held back by unsupportive parents—parents who think, incorrectly, that magic is a waste of time. I feel equally bad for parents who push their unwilling kids into magic; I thought those people only pressured their kids into baseball. You've got to find a balance between passive, supportive, and regimented; different kids respond to different methods.





If you're reading this then your child has read *Under*, the first section. Part two is just for you. I'll give you as much information as I can about the logistics of having a kid interested in magic. Essentially, a young magician's parent wears five hats:

1. Investor
2. Producer
3. Manager
4. Agent
5. Chauffeur

We'll examine these roles individually, in the order you'll play them. Let's get started...

*Joshua Jay*  
New York City  
September, 2008

## Why magic?

I believe there to be no finer pastime for a child than magic. I'm biased of course, but I well remember going through the motions of t-ball, piano lessons, swim team, boy scouts, and youth group—they were fun, but nothing has been as continually fulfilling as my time in magic. It provides invaluable life lessons, too numerous to list. Here are some biggies.

**Confidence Builder.** Magic tricks are projects. Each one involves learning, practicing, polishing, and then performing in front of people. This entire process, once realized, is a huge rush and instills a sense of real accomplishment. All this leads to increased confidence, both in public speaking, and in one's ability to follow through on a project.

**Public Speaking** is the average person's biggest fear. That's right—it ranks above drowning or being murdered in your sleep. Whether your child aspires to be the next Copperfield or a lawyer or a teacher, nearly every

Manhattan's Jeff Liebowitz is one of New York's most successful trial attorneys. He has always had an interest in magic, and he has found a way to incorporate these skills in his chosen profession.



Jeff Liebowitz: The first time I did magic for a jury was a long time ago. The facts of the case were strongly against us, so no one wanted to try the case because they were afraid of losing. I was given the case because I was a young attorney with little trial experience, so my superiors figured that it would be a good experience for me, even though I would probably lose. I opened jury selection with a rope trick called "Professor's Nightmare." The jury loved it and for the remainder of the trial, the "magician" lawyer had their undivided attention. I don't think I won because I did magic, but the magic helped position me in a more positive light.

I am a civil trial attorney, usually on the defense side. That means that when I pick a jury for a case, I speak second. The attorney for the plaintiff speaks to the prospective jurors first. He or she usually speaks for about an hour...and bores them to death! Most attorneys forget that aside from their legal duties, they must entertain. We all had boring teachers in school. But (hopefully) we also had some who understood that to teach, you have to entertain a little, too. We listen more closely to them because we are interested in what they have to say. For me, magic is the perfect way to get the jury's attention, and it has become a memorable, defining feature for me among my colleagues and clients.

job involves speaking in front of other people. Magic is all about public speaking, being improvisational on stage, and adapting to situations as they occur.

**Independence.** Team sports, after-school activities, and church groups are wonderful pastimes for certain people, but I often observe that these activities emphasize working with (and relying on) other people. That's important, but self-reliance is infinitely more important. It is also harder to teach. But when the curtains part, your child is the only one onstage, and this helps build stress management skills. If magic has taught me one thing, it is this: you can't rely on anyone except yourself.

**A Love for Reading** is hard to instill in a child. My parents tried unsuccessfully by telling me I could read for an hour before bedtime. But it wasn't until I discovered magic that I *wanted* to read. That love of reading has spread to many different subjects, but it started because all of magic's greatest secrets are buried in books, and if you want to be a better magician, you have to crack the books.

**Financial Responsibility.** If your child begins performing for money, he or she must learn to manage this money. While the amounts are not significant at first, these first paying gigs help establish the value of a dollar and build bookkeeping skills.

**Grooming.** This sounds a bit pedestrian, but I had to think about being presentable five years before any of my friends did. I was a performer, and had a responsibility to my clients to dress and look and act my best.

**A Hidden Talent.** Being involved in magic doesn't mean your child will become professional or skip college to join the circus. Many of the best magicians I know perform only in their spare time, for family and friends. Others have integrated magic into their jobs, using tricks to break the ice or make a sale or loosen up a jury. My father—a dentist—used magic to cool out nervous kids in the dental chair. Magic is a great asset in meeting new people or breaking the ice.

# How much does it cost?

## Hat #1: Investor

Every business needs startup capital, and your child's magic career is no different. What does it cost to be a magician? 780 dollars: pay now, in three easy installments of...

It's a lot of money, but kids are expensive. If your child decides he wants to play basketball, what happens? You buy a basketball hoop (500 dollars), a leather ball (30 dollars), a squeaky pair of Air Jordans (120 dollars), a couple jerseys with the number 23 (50 dollars), and admission to a league (200 dollars). Being a magician is cheaper than being an athlete.

Of course, prices will vary depending on your child's enthusiasm and interests. But by my calculations (and 2008 pricing), 780 dollars is a good estimate. The breakdown is as follows:

50 dollars for resources. This includes one book and one DVD, and should probably be the first purchase made. You'll observe three things after this purchase. First, you'll have a better idea about your child's skill level and aptitude for magic. Second, you'll be able to gauge his enthusiasm. That is, is he learning, practicing, and *using* the material or is it still on his desk, unopened? Third, you'll better understand how he learns. Perhaps he responds better in a quiet room, alone with a book. Or maybe he needs your help as he follows along with an instructional video. Perhaps the only way to cement his skills is with personal instruction. Fifty dollars will buy you the answers to these fundamental questions.

30 dollars for magic club dues. There are two large magic organizations in the United States and lots of unaffiliated clubs. You'll have to research your local scene to find the best fit for your child. Good clubs have incentives and programming for youth members, and some have adjusted pricing. Thirty dollars is an estimate and may vary from city to city. But whatever the cost, a monthly meeting is a great place for your child to get help from more experienced magicians and perform in front of peers. It's also *the* place for you to compare notes with other magic parents or knowledgeable performers.

500 dollars for a magic show. Before your child can make money with magic shows, he'll need a show. You can't buy a complete show, but for a twenty-five minute children's show, five-hundred dollars is a good estimate. The props, which are mostly metal and painted wood, are large and expensive. He'll need a magic table or stand, as well as a trunk to hold the props. There are also lots of gadgets and gizmos in a show that the audience never sees. While they may seem invisible to the audience, they don't have invisible price tags. Sometimes what looks cheap...isn't. I remember seeing a length of coiled plastic—it was labeled "Appearing Cane"—it cost sixty dollars (I bought three). The tricks should be purchased piecemeal and only when your child has mastered the items he has. But, before he can do his first gig, he needs a full show, and that takes the most significant investment.

150 dollars for wardrobe. Find more details on this under "Appearance," but whether your child does one show or one show a week, he needs a costume. The outfit should be formal but flashier than the suit he wore to Uncle Tim's wedding.

50 dollars for promotional materials. Business cards, glossy photos, and carbon contracts are all helpful for performing young magicians. Some of these items can now be done at home with a good desktop publishing program and a printer, but photo shoots and copy stores are expensive.

Still sound like a lot of money? It is, but remember that you need not (and should not) purchase all this at once. Buy your child a book and see how he or she responds. Buy enough props for a short show and see if magic is really a good fit, and then proceed with the other expenses.

# How can I help my child get better?

## Hat #2: Producer

You are your child's first and most important audience. This role requires a delicate balance of understanding and honesty, and it's not an enviable position. On one hand, a child who is trying something for the first time needs unbridled encouragement. On the other hand, undeserved praise helps no one (neither the child nor his eventual audiences).

My father was a master at this. I never heard the phrase, "That's bad," or "I don't like that one," or "I can see what you're doing." I heard, "Let's work on this part," or "I think I've got a better way to do that," or "Can you try that again, but this time keep your fingers together."

Proud parents develop blind spots in their child's repertoire. He might drop something here or expose a trick there, but he's just so adorable when he's performing that Mom is able to see past his exposing how the trick works.

Don't fall into this trap. In a kind way, you have to be the most critical spectator your child will ever perform for. Tell him about every secret move he accidentally exposes, every hidden gimmick that flashes, every invisible thread you can see—if he can satisfy your critical eye, he's bound to please everyone else, too.

# How will he get shows?

## Hat #3: Manager

You're not expected to have a degree in marketing, but you are expected to know more than your child about the subject. Marketing magic is a learned skill, just like the performance of magic. And right now, the performance of magic should be your child's priority. Marketing magic should be *your* priority.

First, you must determine what type of magic interests your child. If your child wants to be a children's magician, cater to this demographic. Go to all the grade schools, after-school centers, and kid-gyms and ask if you can provide entertainment for events and display promotional materials. Call all your friends and ask if they need entertainment for their child's next party. And be on the lookout for charity events, church and scout functions, and block parties.

You aren't responsible for your child's continuing performance success. His good magic will increase his business. But the first few shows don't appear like magic; *you* have to do the sleight-of-hand.

# Who will be my child's agent?

## Hat #4: Agent

You. By serving as your child's agent, you'll be able to secure fairer, higher prices. When work starts coming his way, your child will be in an unfair position. Never having dealt with money or negotiation, he won't know what to charge. Never having driven a car, he won't know how to write down directions. Never having done a show, he won't know what questions to ask the client. You can help. You will take the calls.

Stealing candy from a baby is easy for an adult, and so is cheating a young magician. As your child's agent, you'll be able to conduct a level-headed conversation with your child's clients and make sure a fair transaction occurs. For some reason, even ethical adults have a hard time taking a child seriously when it comes to money. When a fourteen-year-old quotes a three-digit number, the inclination for some adults is to move immediately into barter-mode.

Some adults think that since the magician is half the age of last year's entertainer, he should be half the cost. Some adults think that a child's performance means an amateur performance, and the price should reflect this. Some adults feel that *they* are doing your child a favor by giving him an outlet in which to perform.

Clients will be far less likely to try to negotiate a price with you, and so you should make a point to confirm bookings for your child. Sometimes you can work together on the phone. The client can talk to your child about the show, and then pass the phone to Mom or Dad for pricing.

My father set up an excellent system. He kept a neat stack of carbon contracts by each phone in our house. When he wasn't home to help, I had a cue sheet on what to ask and what to say. No matter who booked the show or took the call, we had all the basics (in triplicate): directions, pricing, audience size, etc.



# Who drives?

## Hat #3: Chauffeur

While the limousine and British accent aren't required, time and patience are. Unless you're in Los Angeles or Las Vegas, your area is likely deficient in magicians. That keeps all the working professionals busy on the weekends. Sometimes you have to accept shows outside the city lines, and sometimes a high-paying performance will entice you to travel further than usual. Before your child accepts a show, you have to make sure you or someone trustworthy can transport him.

Gas money adds up. One Christmas season, I had almost 20 shows in the month of December. That's a lot of shows and a lot of driving! My dad and I agreed that the next Christmas season, I would reimburse him for his gas mileage. When I booked shows in Cleveland, I anticipated another 2 hours of driving. I always cleared this with my parents to make sure someone could take an afternoon off. I also built in the added cost of a half-tank of gas.

In the beginning, it's fun to watch your child perform magic. But like any frequent repetition, it gets tedious. My mom and dad often alternated in taking me to shows. If I had two shows on a Saturday, sometimes I would have a different driver for each one. That said, both my parents told me in my college years that they missed the times we spent together, driving to shows.

# What should my child charge for a magic show?

Although I've tried to provide realistic dollars and cents wherever possible, pricing is too complicated to give examples. The price of your child's show should be determined by four factors:

1. Type of show
2. Audience Size
3. Travel Time
4. Competitor's Rates

## 1. Type of Show

You'll need to determine what type of magic your child wants to perform. A weekly strolling gig in a restaurant won't pay as well as a church banquet or a school assembly. An office party will almost certainly pay better than a children's party.

## 2. Audience Size

Larger audiences mean higher expenses, thus higher prices. The props required for a living room full of children are smaller than the props required for a show in front of a gymnasium full of children. Setting up a bigger show takes more preparation, and often requires a microphone system. Instead of an hour of your time, a larger booking might consume an entire evening. Your fees should reflect this.

## 3. Travel Time

Like any other job, pricing a magic show is projecting a dollar amount for your child's professional time. A twenty-minute birthday party show for your neighbor might take up less than an hour of time, including setup and teardown. But a forty-minute show two hours each way is a six-hour commitment. You won't be able to book any other shows that day. My school function shows cost three-times as much as my birthday party shows did because on a Saturday, I could do three small parties in the time it took to perform one large show for an auditorium of children.

#### 4. Competitor's Rates

Within three years of performing professionally, I was one of the busiest acts in Canton, Ohio. I was pulled aside by the area's local professional, and he did himself and me an honorable service. He gave me "the chat."

In the years since, I've seen him give several other budding magicians "the chat," and it's not an easy thing to do. It concerns money and, to a degree, what another magician charges is none of our business. But if you're ready, you and I need to "chat."

Every time your child does a good show, he can expect two more bookings. Little Janie wants the kid-magician she saw at Susie's party, and Little Janie gets everything she wants. Janie also has two younger brothers, and they want a magician, too. It happens fast. One week he's donating shows for promotion and two weeks later he's so busy he's turning down work.

A young, busy magician has a right and a need to perform. As such, he shouldn't be expected to perform at the level of a seasoned professional, and his pricing should reflect that. After all, you get what you pay for. But that only lasts so long.

The chat came when our local professional noticed a marked drop-off in birthday party business. He charged three-times what I charged, and most of his clients came to me.

"If you're going to be in this business," he said, "then you've got to stop undercutting the guys who make a living." He's right. Your child's first priority is to do as many shows as possible. He needs experience. But the second he makes himself commercially available, he is in competition with professionals, who support families with their earnings. A child doing a show every month for fifty dollars is no threat to a pro who charges 400 dollars per show. But if the child does five shows a week at fifty dollars, the professional loses out on 2100 dollars of opportunity.

A child-performer who doesn't have any overhead expenses must give way to a professional by charging an amount somewhat comparable to the going rate of the other performers for hire.

# Should my child use a contract?

I've included a sample contract similar to the one I used as a child. I know lots of magicians who never use contracts, but I think it's particularly important for young performers. The unacceptable excuses a few clients gave me as a child were pathetic: "The party went way over budget so we can't pay you what you quoted us for the show," or "The party is running late so we won't have time for the magic...we have to cancel..." Nobody would have treated our town's professionals in such a way—but because my show was less expensive and I was a minor, there were several unfortunate events that led me to a contract-bound policy.

The contract outlines only the most pertinent information and, as your child gets more serious about his career, his contract will need modified. But for a first-year professional, this contract works well.

The contract functions as a cue sheet. Before quoting the price, be sure to obtain all the necessary information in the order it is listed. The contract is designed to be read aloud, and serves several built-in purposes.

For example, the form asks the client to estimate the audience size. But it also asks for a maximum or "cap." You'll find that more than half the shows you do will be for more people than the client claims. A contract for a birthday party might read that eight children will be present. When you arrive at the child's home, you discover the party is outdoors in front of sixty people, half of them neighbors and family. Or a client may tell you that fifty kids will be present at a show. She may not tell you that a hundred adults will be watching from the back of the room. The "maximum" number helped me regularly achieve a more realistic number.

The travel time is also outlined in the contract explicitly. It's easier to charge a fair rate for a show when a client understands how much time is truly required to appear at an engagement. This number (in minutes) helps them understand that, sometimes, a twenty-minute show is a whole day's worth of work.

When you have the contract printed, make sure it's carbonless and printed in triplicate. The carbonless forms are less messy than sandwiching the copies between ink sheets, and three copies allow for the most organized records. When a contract is sent out, you keep one copy and send two to the client. The contract instructs her to sign both and send one back to you.

# Performance Contract

DATE:

CLIENT NAME:

CLIENT PHONE NUMBER:

This contract certifies that *(NAME OF PERFORMER)* will perform *(TYPE OF SHOW)* on *(DATE OF SHOW)* at *(TIME OF SHOW)*. The duration of the show will be *(LENGTH OF SHOW)* and the audience size is approximately *(AUDIENCE SIZE)*, not exceeding *(AUDIENCE MAXIMUM)*. It is understood that a major breach in start time or audience size will affect the impact of the show and could affect pricing.

The show will be held at *(LOCATION OF SHOW)*. This venue is approximately *(DURATION OF TRAVEL)* from the performer's starting point.

The cost of the show is *(PRICE OF SHOW)* and this amount will be due, in full, upon completion of performance. Please note that there will be a 30% charge for all cancellations occurring less than seven days prior to a performance. Please notify the performer immediately for any change in venue or time.

Please provide your name and address:

Please provide directions to the show venue:

SIGNED \_\_\_\_\_

Please sign both forms and send one back to:

David Oliver offers a gentler approach to the contract, which will work well if your child is just starting his or her performance career. I particularly like the line insisting that at least two adults remain in the room throughout the show—I well remember parents who considered me, the magician, a babysitter for the party. As soon as I walked on they walked off.

This type of letter will make all the details solid. It doesn't feel like a scary "contract" to housewives and moms. It seems like a simple "letter." But, it will act as a formal contract because all the details are spelled out, and you have both signed it, and both have a copy.

Dear Mrs. Smith.

I enjoyed speaking with you on the phone.

Thank you so much for asking me to perform at Jason's birthday party. It's always fun for me to provide that magic touch to special events.

This letter will confirm the details that we spoke about on the phone.

1 - Jason's party begins at 1:00pm on Saturday, June 10th, 2011.

2 - The party will be held at your home at 123 Sicamore Drive, in Boston, MA 00010. I have your phone number 617-000-0000, in case I have any last minute questions or driving problems.

3 - My magic show will begin approximately at 2:00pm. I will arrive no later than 1:30 to get set-up for the show.

4 - My magic show will last 35 minutes, and include magic and comedy for everyone. If he's up for it, I will do my best to perform a special routine that includes Jason at the end of my show. (I have found that some kids get a bit shy at their own party — so I never force anyone to help.)

5 - We have agreed that my fee is \$500,000 payable by cash or check made out to me, Mike Smith, immediately following my performance at the party.

6 - At least two adults will remain in the room where I do the show, for additional supervision of the kids during the show.

7 - You have also agreed to send me written driving directions to your home.

8 - I have sent two copies of this letter to you. Please sign and date both, and return one copy to me. This will serve as our formal agreement, make sure we are both "on the same page." If something should happen to change any of the details (for example date, times or location), a new letter will be sent confirming those changes that we mutually agree on.

Once again, I look forward to meeting you on June 10th and providing some magic for Jason's special day! If you have any questions before then, please call me anytime.

Magically Yours

(signature)

Mike Smith, magician  
Dec-09-2008

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mrs. Trudy Smith (please sign & date)

## Should my child work with an agent?

No. There are lots of small-time talent agencies that plan local parties. Most of these agents are not really agents, but rather glorified party planners. There's a huge difference between a party planner and an agent.

Agents are contacted by clients for entertainment. They represent entertainers and make a percentage of the performer's fee. It is usually to an agent's advantage to get an entertainer a higher fee (because it will yield a higher percentage).

Party planners are given a budget to plan an event. If a party planner hires an entertainer, it's to her advantage to pay him less so she can distribute the budget money elsewhere.

A legitimate agent is unlikely to be interested in a performer under seventeen. There are too many starving adult-entertainers with more experience. I have found that, without exception, "agents" who are looking to work with younger talent pay almost nothing.



# He wants to do tricks with fire. Should I allow it?

This famous debate echoes throughout magic shop showrooms all over the world. The scene is always the same: a hopeful ten-year-old salivates at the sight of a golden, sexy flame he's never been allowed to go near. Magic is his excuse to play with fire. Mom thinks it's too dangerous. "Besides," she says, "there are lots of tricks here without fire."

The debate about fire tricks is ultimately a question of responsibility. There isn't a universal age when tricks with fire are appropriate. I had a roommate in college who should never be allowed near an open flame (I'll never forget the night he discovered that alcohol is flammable).

## David Oliver on fire magic

I do not allow my students to use fire in their acts until they are at least 18 years old and have had proper training. I teach them how to handle fire, how to protect themselves from accidents, what the different types of smoke detectors are, laws about fire and more.



I have learned to use my judgement as to whether or not to use fire in my show and how to deal with the consequences. If you drop a fan of cards, spill some water or break a glass at a show in someone's living room, it can be cleaned up quite easily. On the other hand, if you drop a match or spill some lighter fluid, an entirely different result can occur. This is not only about being a teen; it can happen to anyone. I know many professionals who have had accidents with fire.

As a teenager or young performer, you really can't know what is going through the minds of your audience when they see you "light up." Are they going to watch your act, or look around trying to figure out where the closest exit is located? I would rather have them enjoy the magic instead of planning an exit strategy during my performance! On the opposite end of the scale, if a younger kid sees a magician using matches or a lighter it becomes "cool." If a young kid sees someone close to their age playing with fire, it negates anything their parents or teachers may have told them. This could potentially become a problem after you leave.

So, should you let your child use fire in their act? Ultimately, it's up to you, but if it were up to me, the answer would be no.

Also understand that for larger crowds, effects with fire are powerful, visual, and often give the appearance of professionalism. There are certain tricks Uncle Bob just doesn't do—fire tricks are mysterious to laypeople.

I was allowed to work with flash paper and lighter fluid under close supervision at age twelve. I wanted to learn these effects, and my father knew they would make my show better. So he taught me how to take precautions. He set a strict rule that I was not to practice these effects without an adult present. Fortunately, we never had an incident.

### **Are there any other dangers I should know about?**

The classic, wonderful effect of a cane appearing or vanishing is a staple in most cabaret magic shows. The method is simple: long coils extend to form canes or collapse to be hidden in the palm. Today, they come in both metal and plastic. From three feet away, you can't tell the difference. But metal canes, particularly of the appearing variety, can leave gruesome cuts on the palm. A member of our local magic club has a scar on his palm that looks like a deep-sea fishing accident. He got it trying to produce a cane. Plastic canes are more affordable and can be purchased from most magic shops.

## Is it true you can get magic insurance?

Yes. Magic insurance may be helpful to busy performers. I have carried it since I started in magic. I was never worried about burning a client's house down, but what happens if I drop a dove pan during my cake-baking routine (eggs, flour, and other ingredients are mixed in the child's living room). What happens if I borrow a ring from a woman and when I hand it back, it's missing a stone?

Perhaps I have a dark imagination—but I always felt the investment was worth it (in the interest of full disclosure, I will add that I've never submitted a claim). You can obtain magic insurance through the Society of American Magicians<sup>13</sup>. The cost is reasonable and covers property damage (including damage by spectators) for up to a million dollars.

13. Visit [www.magicsam.com](http://www.magicsam.com) for insurance details.

# Are there organizations that can help?

Yes, there are two large magic fraternities: The Society of American Magicians<sup>14</sup> and the International Brotherhood of Magicians<sup>15</sup>. These organizations have clubs that meet in cities all over the world. You'll have to look into which group meets in your area.

Both organizations also have youth programs. Both youth initiatives have come a long way, but unfortunately both also have a long way to go. The youth newsletters and events, I always felt, catered to the extreme beginner. And if your child is at all serious about magic, there's a chance these initiatives will be aimed beneath his or her level. In the United Kingdom, seek out the Young Magician's Club<sup>16</sup>, the Magic Circle's youth program.

But the real value in these organizations is the face-to-face contact your child will get with other local magicians. There is no substitute for personal instruction, and once a month your child will have a chance to perform and watch others perform. Local clubs sponsor lectures, fundraisers, charity events, and banquets. Clubs are an excellent connection for shows and a good networking opportunity. If your child is serious about magic, he or she needs to be involved on a local level.



14. Visit [www.magicsam.com](http://www.magicsam.com) for membership details.

15. Visit [www.magician.org](http://www.magician.org) for membership details.

16. Visit [www.themagiccircle.co.uk](http://www.themagiccircle.co.uk) for membership details.

# My child wants to go to a magic convention. Should I let him miss school?

That's your call, but my parents allowed me. My grades were good and I was serious about magic; other kids missed school for their interests (sports tournaments, family vacations), and by comparison a magic convention doesn't seem so unreasonable.

Magic conventions are clinics on magic, where your child will see, learn, compete, and buy magic. But conventions are also social affairs, and he or she is sure to make friends and get priceless hands-on instruction. If your child is under 18 plan to go with him; if he is under 14 plan to attend all events with him. If your child is female, be cautious; remember that magic conventions are hundreds and hundreds of guys who do card tricks. They're nice guys, but still...

Conventions typically provide a spousal rate for non-magicians and many even have youth rates. Check your local conventions for details.

Magic conventions—particularly your first—are memories magicians cherish forever. My mom and I went to Las Vegas when I was young, and everything about that trip was an adventure, and I look back on it as one of my fondest memories with her.

# Would my child like magic camp?

Almost certainly. Magic camp is a week where campers practice, perform, eat, live, and breathe magic. There are several magic camps across the United States, but two reputable organizations lead the pack. Each camp is one week in duration and offered just one session each summer.

There are lots of concerns for parents sending young kids to another state alone, often by plane. These concerns are legitimate. Don't make any decisions until talking to the camp directors. They'll provide information on airport pickup, safety, diet or medical restrictions. I know the directors at both camps personally and I'm sure each of them would be willing to talk to you. I have provided contact information below.

## Tannen's Magic Camp

When I was younger, there was really only one magic camp: Tannen's. I attended two consecutive summers and I reflect back on those two weeks as seminal in my magical development. Now in its 35th year, Tannen's offers in-depth classes taught by capable instructors.

The camp takes place at a beautiful college campus outside Philadelphia. There are dorm-style sleeping arrangements, the food is served in a cafeteria, and the classes are taught in real classrooms.

Campers take morning classes based on ability (beginner, intermediate, and advanced). There are elective courses taught in the afternoon on subjects like cards, stage manipulation, linking rings, and ballooning. There are shows every evening and stage and close-up competitions with trophy prizes.

Because of its close proximity to New York City, the counselors and instructors are made up of the best, busiest pros in the business. David Blaine attended as a child and David Copperfield showed up unannounced a few years ago.

The classes at Tannen's are intense and the week is spent almost exclusively indoors. The price of this camp (2008 pricing) is 1095 dollars<sup>17</sup>.

17. Visit [www.tannens.com](http://www.tannens.com) for more information. Contact camp directors Terri or Dennis Cook at (718) 631-8908 for other concerns.

### Sorcerer's Summer Safari

Imagine a magic clinic in a real camp setting: this is Sorcerer's Summer Safari. This camp was formed eight years ago, long after I was eligible to attend as a camper. However, I was invited to be the guest of honor in 2002 and returned several times in subsequent years. I have a good feel for this camp as well.

This camp is set two and half hours north of Toronto, Canada, at Camp White Pines (where they filmed *Meatballs*). The venue is an actual campground, complete with forest, cabins, and a private lake; the scenery is beautiful.

The "feel" of this camp is much more traditional. In addition to magic courses, electives, tutorials, and shows, Sorcerer's Summer Safari offers campers free time for swimming, hiking, playing volleyball or basketball, or jumping on the trampoline.

The instructors at this camp are particularly good with children and provide excellent teachers for both the beginner and advanced student.

### Mike Segal on Sorcerer's Summer Safari

Magic Mike Segal runs Sorcerer's Summer Safari and has mentored numerous young magicians. He's also a busy professional in the Toronto area. And he's the perfect person to help define what sets magic camp apart.



What does magic camp offer that a convention doesn't?

Magic Mike: When Sorcerers Safari started, I honestly didn't know what the differences would be. In the ten years we have been running I have discovered many unique features.

Interaction is a huge part of the camp experience. The counselors and magic personalities are not hired to do a show and then spend the rest of the time in their room. Camp is a social affair, and each camper gets many opportunities to eat, jam, and perform with the magicians they read about or watch on DVDs. All meals, cabin activities, swimming etc. are done together, as a full camp. No one at camp is passive, and we pull together, campers and staff alike, to make it work.

Camp is longer than a convention, and that gives kids and their counselors a chance to form close bonds. Lifelong connections are made, and we're proud to spark friendships among campers that carry over after camp is over.

And, it goes without saying, that the camp is an intensive magic training clinic. We are all working together to make the next generation appreciate and add to the art of magic.

The instructor to camper ratio here is best, and many campers graduate into a “Counselor in Training” program, returning the following year as staff. Throughout the week, each camper receives lots of personal instruction and help. The electives are more specific here, offering workshops on individual tricks like “Zombie” or “Linking Rings” (I taught one on “Ambitious Card”). Star power at Sorcerer’s Safari is also strong: last year two of the biggest names in magic headlined.

The sense of community is strong at this camp, and founders Mike and Jen Segal also offer a spring break reunion. They have an email listserv with year-round pictures and updates.

At the time of publication, the price for this camp is 850 dollars<sup>18</sup>.

18. Visit [www.sorcerers-safari.com](http://www.sorcerers-safari.com) or call Mike and Jen Segal, camp founders, at (416) 322-1442



## David Oliver on parental involvement

As a mentor to many young magicians, I asked David what his thoughts were on how much parents should help their children with magic.

Every parent wants to help his or her kid. But sometimes, it's better to take a step back, and let them learn either through their own experiences, successes and mistakes, or from someone else. My simple recommendation is this: when it comes to general life lessons, you are there to help. When it comes to magic (even if you have some performing experience), take a few steps back.



In the beginning, you will more than likely be your child's first audience. This is great. He or she will be able to show you a trick or routine, and will get excited with your approval, or expression of dumbfoundedness. Eventually, they will outgrow their need for only having your advice for magic. This does not make you a bad parent. I would expect my child who has an interest in cooking to outgrow my knowledge of cooking Spaghetti-O's.

One great way to help your child is to find someone else who knows the subject better than you. There are clubs and lessons available in virtually every city and town, if you know where to look. Ask at a local magic shop, or perhaps ask a performer after their own show about contacting them at a later date for lessons or advice for your child. Sit in on the first few lessons, to understand the techniques of the magic, learn about the teacher's style and be able to ask questions until you feel comfortable. Then, sit back and let the progress begin.

As a parent, you will want to be aware of the props, equipment and books your child purchases, quite possibly because you are the one most likely paying for them. This is fine, as long as you don't try to learn the methods or "secrets" behind the magic. Your child will want to keep this to themselves to be able to entertain you and gain your approval later. Of course, don't be afraid to ask the magic shop salesperson before the purchase about safety or appropriateness of the effect. Once at home, let your kid discover the rest for himself.

I recommend to families of younger kids to have one parent be the designated "magic helper." This way, one parent has been "sworn to secrecy" about the trick or effect, can offer advice from an adult perspective, while the other parent can sit on the sidelines and enjoy the performance later, knowing that everything is okay.

As your child begins performing shows for family and friends, schools and organizations, take a step back. Yes, you'll be

the one driving, and you will more than likely help them carry their stuff in. But “The Great Scott-ini” is the magician. Let him meet the client, do the talking and set-up the props, tables and equipment for the show. He will make mistakes. More importantly, he will learn from his mistakes, if he is allowed to make them. If you set-up the equipment at every show, and you talk to the client “to help,” and you try to protect him from everything, he will fail. It’s not about you.

I had a ten-year-old student once, who’s father went with him to every show, made all the phone calls, set up the tables, folded the silks, loaded the props, helped his son get dressed in his tuxedo, and handed out the business cards after the shows - until the kid was 18 years old! I had tried for years to get them to break this habit. Within a month of being at college, I got a phone call from this kid who had his first show at school - without his dad - and he didn’t know how to set up his own act. He was embarrassed to call his dad for help, because he didn’t want to disappoint him. Ironically, his dad had helped him to fail.

Eventually, your child may perform at magic conventions, or on shows with multiple performers and professional stage managers. The best thing you can do is be available to help, but be available in an out-of-the way place. More than likely, these people have done this before (perhaps for years!), and your “help” will become a distraction. Don’t become what is negatively known as a “stage parent.” This is not a tag you want to be associated with. I know of many young performers who have never been asked back to perform at certain events, because their parents were difficult to deal with, or got in the way. Don’t be that parent. Let the director or stage manager take charge, ask the questions and help your young magician.

The best way you can help with their magic is to give your child the gift of communication skills. Teach them how to ask questions, teach them how to answer questions, teach them how to take advice and suggestions. Teach them how to be a team-player (which comes in very handy when there are other acts on the bill). Once you’ve given them these skills and tools, step back and let them learn to use them. You will be very proud of the results.

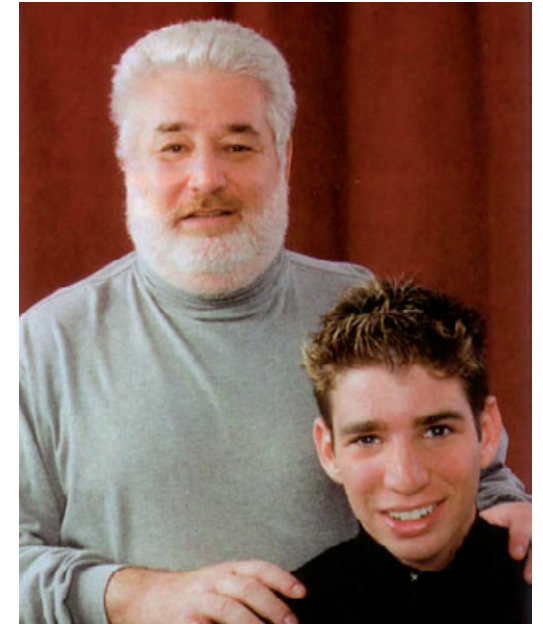
## How much should I help?

My fondest childhood memories involve my parents and magic. Watching my first “big” show, helping me rehearse, cleaning out the rabbit cage—they were always there, waiting in the wings. I was lucky to have such supportive parents, and the simple fact that you’re almost done reading this manual means that you intend to play an active role in your child’s chosen hobby. The question, then, is how active should *you* be?

As much as young magicians require your assistance, they also need their space. We’ve all seen parents who make kids play t-ball against their will—and who among us wanted piano lessons that year.

You have to know when to help and when to watch. Your child will prompt you; you just have to know how to interpret the signs. When he or she seeks out your help, it’s usually warranted. If your kid is having problems assembling the new mentalism routine, lend her a hand. But when she forgets to set up the grand finale, let her squirm. There is no better teacher than experience, and new magicians must learn from their mistakes onstage.

I recall several instances where I felt, at the time, that my father could have helped me. Once I arrived at a show only to discover I had left a key prop at home. He could have easily driven home to grab it for me, but I well remember him saying, “I’m sure you’ll think of something. And next time I’ll bet you won’t forget the milk pitcher.” To this day, I have a checklist for props and I never forget anything. Being a magician means being resourceful and creative, and your participation should encourage these traits, not inhibit them.



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