

You Can't Trick Me!

by RV Staff Writer J.C.

The action movie we were watching was over. I turned the TV off and asked my mom, "Do all bad guys look like that?"

"I'm glad you asked," she said. "In real life, bad guys can look like anybody. They can look like me, or Dad, or even Grandpa. They can look like nice ladies or funny men or even friendly teenagers. They can look like our neighbors, the person who works at the grocery store, or an aunt or uncle. They do not always look like the bad guys in the movies."

Then how can I tell who is a bad guy and who isn't?" I replied.

"Think of yourself as a magician," Mom said. "Always be on the lookout for a trick."

"Huh?" I squished up my nose and wrinkled my forehead. "I don't get it."

"Bad guys – or girls – will always try to trick you. Don't fall for it. Want to test it out?"

"Okay," I said.

"Let's say you are walking to the park, and a car pulls up slowly. The driver rolls down his window and asks you for directions. Is it safe to get closer and help?"

"I don't know. Maybe he's lost. I know my way around here really well," I boasted.

"It's a trick." Mom said. "Adults don't ask kids for directions. They ask other grown-ups. The driver might be trying to get you near enough to grab you. Don't fall for it."

I nodded. That made sense.

"Now let's say a pretty lady walks up to you and your friends. She says she works for a candy company and is handing out free samples. She gives you one and says there are more in her car. Do you go with her?"

"Well, maybe she's a bad guy, but maybe not; we get free samples at the store all the time."

Mom smiled. "That's true. But you are with me then, and we are in a store with people who work there. It's different. Do you see how the lady could be trying to lure you away from your friends to get you alone? Don't fall for it."

"Got it, Mom. It's a trick. And who would give away free candy anyway? That's just crazy."

Mom said, "And it's not always someone with a car, either. Want to test some harder ones?" I nodded.

"I know how much you love dogs. Say a person came by the schoolyard at recess and was looking for her lost puppy. Would you go with her to search for it?"

"What if she really lost her dog, though?" Dogs run off all the time, I thought. That could be true.

"Do you think a good person would ask a child they don't know to leave school during school hours?"

"It's a trick?" I guessed. Mom gave me a high five.

"Always look for the trick," she replied. "If she really lost her dog, there are other ways she could find it. Asking a kid to leave school is not a good way."

Mom continued. "This one is tougher. You have said you would like to be an actor or singer. What if a person, dressed nicely, holding a clipboard and everything, comes up to you and your friends. He asks if you want to be famous; he's shooting a TV commercial, and you would be perfect for it. You just need to go with him to sign some forms or maybe so he can get his camera. Do you go?"

"Nooo...?" I guessed. "But it would be hard to say no to a chance to be on television, Mom!"

"I know that. And the tricky people know that, too. But you know that for actors and performers, this is their job, right? That means they would go to auditions to try out for the job, then work in a studio to film it. Nobody ever gets famous because of a stranger on the street. Got it?"

"Got it. It's a trick. No one is going to be able to fool me, Mom!"

"I sure hope so, honey. Here's one last test, and it might be the hardest. A person you know a little bit, like a friend's dad, a neighbor, or maybe someone from church or soccer, comes over to you and says that I'm hurt. They say I'm in the hospital, or I'm sick, or my car broke down, and I asked them to come and bring you to me. You don't know where I am and you feel worried. What do you do?"

"Nobody would do that as a trick; it's too mean," I said.

"It happens. What would you do?" Mom asked again.

"How do I know if it's a real emergency, and you are hurt?" The thought made my eyes feel like crying, and I sniffed it away.

"Listen to me carefully. This is important." Mom bent down to look at me face to face. "I would never send anyone to get you that you don't really know. We are going to make a plan right now, and you can use it every time you think someone could be trying to trick you. Let's make a list of the three people who are safe in an emergency. Then we are going to pick a special, top-secret code word that only we know. If the person talking to you doesn't know the code word, then you know it is a

trick.”

“Like super-secret spy stuff? Cool!” My mom smiled and gave me a really big hug. It felt like she might never let me go. And that was perfectly fine with me.

Questions

1. What does a tricky person look like?
2. What is one of the situations from the story where a child might be in danger?
3. What lesson does this story teach us?
4. What plan did the mother and child make? Is it a good idea to make one for yourself?