Impossible Total

THE TRICK: After closing his fist over an odd number of coins that add up to an even amount in value, the magician asks a member of the audience to guess whether the total he has is odd or even. No matter what the child says, the magician tells him, his answer will be wrong.

THE SECRET: The trick depends on how the magician defines total. If the boy or girl guesses odd, the magician opens his fist to reveal, say, a dime, a nickel and five pennies. Then he says: "Sorry, you're wrong. The total is 20 cents." If, on the other hand, the child guesses even, the magician counts the number of coins—a total of seven—and again the child is wrong. This trick, of course, only works with small children, and even they are very likely to catch on if the stunt is repeated.