

COURAGE'S WALK IN THE PARK

By Sonia Santiago

On a beautiful warm, sunny day, Courage the Lion, decides to go to Drug Free Park for his daily walk. Courage loves to walk because he knows that it is a good way to exercise and stay healthy. As he gets close to the park, he notices kids playing on the swings, sliding down the sliding board, running, and playing in the sandbox. The chatter of adults, laughter from the children having a good time fills Courage with joy and puts a smile on his face.

Courage has lots of friends, and he hopes to see some of his middle school classmates at the park. He quickly spots Tommy, Miguel, Maria, and Suzy huddled by the see-saw, but they do not see him. As Courage walks towards them, he notices a boy he has never met before offering Miguel what looks like a Tic-Tac. Courage speeds up his pace in hopes of stopping Miguel before he puts it in his mouth. Courage is very concerned. He knows that kids should never put anything like this in their mouths, because it might not be safe for their bodies and could cause serious harm.

When the unfamiliar boy sees Courage coming towards them, he runs away. Miguel immediately throws the item to the ground. But it is too late; Courage sees it lying in the tall grass. As he suspected, it is not a Tic Tac, but some type of pill. Tommy, Miguel, Maria, and Suzy are surprised to see Courage, and they become uneasy. He is their friend, and they know he would not approve of the boy with the Tic-Tac. Courage invites them to walk with him to the pavilion, and the friends sit together on a bench.

Courage is worried about his friends. "You know it's important to keep our bodies healthy," he reminds them.

"I'm healthy," says Tommy. "I get exercise every day!"

"I'm healthy too!" says Maria. "I eat lots of fruits and vegetables."

"I get at least eight hours of sleep every night," Suzy joins in.

Courage smiles at his friends. He's glad they are taking such good care of themselves. Then looks at Miguel.

"Do you remember what the lady from the Council on Chemical Abuse or COCA taught us when she visited our school?" Courage asks.

Miguel shyly responds, "She said you should not put anything in your mouth without the permission of a parent."

"That's right," says Courage. "And do you remember that she told us what a pharmacist is?"

Miguel responds, "Yes! I remember. A pharmacist is someone who gives you medicine."

"Yup!" says Courage. "Pharmacists are 'medicine experts'. They are responsible for preparing the medicine and giving it to the person that received permission from the doctor to take it. And, they teach the person how to safely take their medicine."

"Yes, I remember that lesson," Maria shouts, "A doctor can also teach a person how to take medicine safely."

"That's right!" Courage responds.

"So can your mom and dad," Tommy says.

"And the school nurse," Miguel adds.

"Awesome!" says Courage. "We all have to remember never to put anything in our mouths unless we have permission from a trusted adult. Because, sometimes kids who *act* like they want to be your friend will give you something that

looks like candy. But, it's really something that is bad for you, like a pill or medicine. That's why we should always ask an adult before putting anything in our mouths."

"Do you remember," Courage continues, "that the lady from COCA told us what medicine is."

"I know what medicine is," Tommy says. "It's used to treat an illness."

"Yeah," says Suzy. "It helps you feel better when you're sick."

"And it can help you if you get hurt or have an injury," Maria says.

Courage smiles. He is proud to have such smart friends. But then he frowns.

"We have to remember that medicine can look like candy, just like what the boy gave to Miguel," Courage says, "It looked like a Tic-Tac, but it was actually a pill. If Miguel had eaten that pill, he would have become very sick and might even have been rushed to the hospital!" Courage shakes his head sadly.

"Have you ever noticed that many medicines look like candy?" he asks.

Tommy, Miguel, Maria, and Suzy nod and look down. They are all thinking about what could have happened to Miguel if he had swallowed that pill.

"Do you remember that the lady from COCA told us that it is easy to confuse a pill with candy because a pill may look your favorite candy," Courage reminded his friends. "It may be the same size, color and even the same shape. We need to learn how to tell the difference between candy and medicine, so we do not get sick and end up in the hospital."

"I remember that!" says Suzy. "The lady told us that it's always a good idea to keep candy and medicines in their original containers, so we don't confuse them, or accidentally take the wrong thing. And she also taught us about medicine safety."

"Yes," says Courage. "Do you think it's safe to leave medicine on the kitchen table?"

"No!" his friends all shout together.

"Medicine should be kept in the medicine cabinet," says Miguel.

"Or somewhere high up, like a top shelf, where my baby brother can't get it," says Maria.

"My mother has all her medicines in a special lock box. Even I can't open it," says Tommy.

"That's good," says Courage. "We all want to be safe. I remember that the lady told us never to share our medicine with someone else, even if they have the same illness we had.

"Right!" says Suzy. "It's not safe to share medicines that have been prescribed for you by a doctor. And it's against the law!"

Courage is very relieved that his friends are safe, and he's happy that they all know how to be safe around medications.

Now let's do an activity to see how well you can tell the difference between a pill and candy. Today Courage wants you to earn a Medicine Safety Patrol Badge!