

Tips for a Home Visit from Santa

That's Santa! is delighted that you have decided to make us a part of your Christmas memories. To help you in making the most of Santa's visit, we have prepared the following list of suggestions. We are always happy to discuss ways in which we can “plus” your event, so please don't hesitate to contact us.

PREPARE YOUR "SANTA SET"

If photos with Santa will be an important part of your event, you should begin considering the "Santa set" at least a day or two beforehand. Consider where Santa will be seated for pictures and take some sample shots at the same time of day. Alter the lighting accordingly. Don't rely on flashes for the bulk of the lighting or red-eye is pretty much guaranteed. While doing your practice shots, be sure to have all cameras, camcorders and batteries necessary to take the photos you'll want. Be sure your batteries are fresh. Also, make sure you know how to use your camera or camcorder since there is no worse time to learn than just *after* a once-in-a-lifetime moment has passed!

Make sure that you have an appropriate chair for Santa to sit on. Santa needs a chair that is sturdy and stable that will allow his thigh bone to remain parallel to the floor, otherwise the kids will slide. A good, sturdy straight-back dining chair with no arms works well. He should be able to sit comfortably with the chair supporting him plus a child on each knee. Folding chairs, rolling chairs, plastic chairs, and low chairs (the one's you sink into) are not good. If you do not have a suitable chair, Santa has one he can provide free of charge on a first-come, first-served basis.

Also consider the background for the pictures. You may want to set Santa's chair in front of a decorated wall or any festive type of backdrop so your photos will have more impact. Place a wreath, a few Christmas cards or your children's drawings on the wall to make a wonderful difference. Leave a foot or two between the chair and the tree or wall. This will allow room for others to gather around and behind Santa's chair for group photos. Fireplaces do look nice but remember putting Santa too close to a real fire is not good for his comfort or your pictures (sweaty Santa = bad pictures!). For the best pictures, adjust overhead lighting and place table or floor lamps to adequately light the scene. Flashes should only be used to *fill*, not to light the scene. Finally, having a clock in Santa's view can help him to pace his visit.

PREPARE FOR SANTA'S ARRIVAL

Ideally, Santa's arrival should be out of view of your guests, especially doubting tweens and teens. Santa *can* reasonably explain why he's driving a pickup instead of a sleigh, but it's better to not have to. If Santa will need to fill his sack or have his chair unloaded, privacy will be an even greater concern. Also remember that Santa's hair and suit are quickly mussed by rain, so having a greeter with an umbrella is a good idea in wet weather. And the suit is quite warm, so unless you want a sweaty Santa, he needs to park close to your event. A helpful neighbor's garage can be ideal in wet or warm weather.

Santa will gladly hand out candy and gifts that you provide. He can carry in one bag of presents for children or guests (no more than can fit in a 50 gallon lawn bag). Gifts should be labeled in a very legible handwriting, and if there are any challenging pronunciations they should be communicated to Santa before the event. Tags should be taped on well lest they fall off in Santa's sack. It might be a good idea to have a couple of extra presents on hand as well, in case of an unplanned extra guest.

Please brief your adult guests that Santa never breaks from character. This is very important and something most adults do without thinking about the implications. Please don't say things to Santa such as “Why you're one of the best Santas I've ever seen”. Don't ask questions about when he started playing Santa or where did he get his costumes. It's very important that you treat him as *Santa Claus* and not as *someone that plays Santa Claus*.

If at all possible, cool the room to 70 degrees or lower prior to Santa's arrival and gather everyone together for his grand entrance, perhaps to sing Christmas carols. Santa's visit will be brief, he's a very busy guy, so gathering everyone together makes the most of your time!

SANTA'S PRIORITIES

Santa wants to give his full attention to each child, not to managing an "operation". If you have a large group of children to see Santa, you should assign someone to be Santa's helper and coordinate the children as they each visit Santa. This helper can check for dirty hands, use wet wipes if necessary, help with sorting and distributing gifts, and help to ease nerves of and help pose the children for photos.

Santa is a wholesome, child-oriented character. Please instruct your guests to not compromise that image by having Santa hand out adult-oriented gifts, or behaving in a lewd manner either with, or in the presence of, Santa. If at anytime Santa feels such behavior is going unchecked he may cancel the remainder of the event. Please help keep the wonder of Christmas alive for your children and others.

And *Santa wants to include everyone*. Yes, some teenagers will shy away or think it is too childish to have a photo with Santa. Don't worry; Santa can stand up for a "buddy" photo. What about grandma and grandpa? Take a photo with Santa and Grandma hugging. And, nothing is more fun than having Santa ask Grandpa if he's been a good boy.

CONCLUSION OF THE EVENT

Santa cannot be a clock-watcher, so if the host notices that time is running short an interjection of "Hey Santa, how about a story" can signal the end is near. Santa always likes to end his visit with a retelling of *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, but with a twist, as told from Santa's perspective. Be aware that at the end of the story Santa will make his exit wishing a "Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night".

If there is a balance due to Santa, place it inside a Christmas card or envelope. It never looks appropriate when someone gives cash to Santa. So, as Santa is departing, hand him the envelope and say, "Thank you Santa, and here is a Christmas card from all of us" or "is it too late for my wish list?".

If Santa brought his own chair, he will need someone to retrieve it shortly after he stands near the end of the story and deliver it discreetly back to his truck.

I hope this list will help you to plan and execute your vision of the perfect home visit from Santa, and I sincerely thank you for enlisting me to help you realize that vision.

Adapted from an original work by Tim Connaghan, ©2003, 2010 RealSantas.com,
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