

Handy Hints for Special Events with Santa

Guidelines for Event Coordinator's and Staff

By National Santa, Tim Connaghan

The following items are suggestions to assist event planners, coordinators, site managers and others, at special events where Santa will be in attendance and where there is a need to coordinate crowds and/or lines.

1. **Always address Santa as Santa!** Don't spoil the magic of the event. Even if you know his real name, call him Santa.
2. **Everyone is part of a team.** From Santa, to the event coordinator, to the helpers, everyone is a member of a team and teamwork can make or break an event. If you can, make sure everyone knows what his or her job is and the Chain of Command. Who does each worker or volunteer report to? Even Santa must report to someone
3. **Know where everything is.** If you are not familiar with the site for the event, take a few minutes to walk around and get to know where everything is. Where are the restrooms? Telephone? Etc.
4. **Have a changing room or break area for Santa.** Depending on his schedule, Santa may often arrive incognito or in casual wear so as to keep his suit neat and clean. He may need a private area to change and prepare for your event.
5. **Refreshments for a 1-3 hour visit from Santa are often not required.** However, if longer than three hours a snack or meal would be appropriate. Also, as he is wearing a very warm suit, it might be good to have some cool water available to quench his thirst and keep him cool. This can be bottled or if in a glass, it should have a straw, so that he does not get water on his beard or moustache.
6. **Santa may need a fan or more breaks than normal.** Even in the winter months, an indoor event can get quite warm. Especially if the event location gets crowded. Often the guests will have removed their winter coats and hats. But, Santa is still expected to be fully dressed in his Winter best, a very warm and heavy suit, trimmed with fur. He can get overheated if the temperature in the room gets too high. Having a small fan, near where he sits and aimed at his head and shoulders will do wonders in keeping him cool. If a fan is not available, appropriate breaks are truly necessary.
7. **Santa needs appropriate breaks.** Just like other entertainers, even Santa needs a little break after each hour of work. After one hour of work sitting down on a Santa Set, and each hour thereafter, Santa should be allowed to take a 10-minute break. He needs to stretch his legs and cool down. Breaks and break times should be worked out before the event begins. And in most cases, he is also a Senior Citizen and not used to standing for long periods of time.
8. **Have a sturdy chair for Santa to sit in.** Folding chairs and low chairs (the one's you sink into) are not good. Santa usually likes a chair that is sturdy and stable. A good straight-back dining chair with no arms works well. Santa likes to sit-up or on the edge of the chair. And an

arm chair is like an airline seat and he cannot put children on his knee or lap. He should be able to sit comfortably and have a child on each knee.

9. **Place the Chair near a Christmas tree or in a holiday setting.** Maybe in front of an unlit fireplace with stockings hanging, or any festive type of backdrop. Please do not put Santa near a fire. It is too hot, and he is already wearing a very warm suit. Your photos will have more impact when the background has a festive look. 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.

10. **Stanchions or railings are good for controlling large lines.** Most people will respect a rope or barricade, thus leaving helpers more time to work with families and Santa. A simple control gate can be made with two chairs, with guests being asked to line up between them. A simple barrier can be made by a row of chairs.

11. **Things work best with two or more assistants or helpers.** While one helper is controlling the front of the line. The other monitors the rest of the line. Be prepared to answer all kinds of questions from those waiting in line. You might want to have some knowledge of where bathrooms are, and how to direct them to parts of the event site.

12. **Santa's helpers should never handle babies or infants.** Even though a lot of helpers love holding babies, this must be left to the parents. A parent should always place their baby into Santa's arms or their infant on Santa's lap.

13. **Do not lift, carry or handle any child.** If children are to visit with Santa or if photos are taken, allow the parents to take their child or children up to Santa. Helpers, assistants and coordinators should not handle any child unless it is necessary or an emergency. This is not only to reduce insurance liability; it is now something that is considered morally correct. Besides the children will be more comfortable with their parents.

14. **Make sure hands and faces are clean and not sticky.** If children are going to visit or talk with Santa, it is important that the children be clean. Sticky or dirty hands can get in Santa's beard or on his suit and everything will have to stop if Santa has to clean up. Dirty hands are also known to be one of the top transmitters of common germs and viruses. No one wants to be a known transmitter. Parents are usually very good at keeping the kids clean, but in a hectic event like this, kids can surprise all of us.

15. **The best photos are taken in the first five seconds.** Children in strange situations can often be afraid. Parents should always stay with their children as they go up to Santa to help reinforce support to the child. Helpers should inform the parents to take their child or children up to Santa and then quickly move out of the photo area.

16. **Keep the lines moving.** Do not allow a parent or family to take over Santa. Sometimes a parent will pull out a camera and want to take a photo or two. However, there are those parents who think if the digital camera can take 120 photos, they can take all of them with Santa. If a family has their own camera, mention to them that is great and that they can take one or two photos. (If the line is short, and Santa has time, the family can take a few more photos if needed. We never want to upset any family).

17. **Everyone should try to have fun.** There is no use is worrying about anything. If the work gets too hectic, tell someone. Maybe someone can switch places.