

Handy Hints for working with Groups

By National Santa, Tim Connaghan

Guidelines for company employees, family members and volunteers working as Santa's Assistants or Helpers and coordinating groups, long lines and crowds visiting Santa.

- **Stanchions or railings are good for controlling large lines.** Most people will respect a rope or barricade leaving helpers more time to work with families and Santa. A simple barrier can be made by a row of chairs.
- **Things work best with two or more assistants or helpers.** While one helper is working with a family and Santa, the second helper can work with the next family in line.
- **Make sure hands and faces are clean and not sticky.** Sticky or dirty hands can get in Santa's beard or on his suit and everything will have to stop if Santa must 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.
- **Be aware of babies or toddlers with wet bottoms.** (You can usually tell when the child is wet by the way the parent is holding them away from their body.) If Santa, or the family, has a lap pad (rubber or plastic lined) Santa may be able to hold the child. If necessary, the helper/s should encourage the parents to change the child. When this is done, the parent and child should be allowed re-entry at the front of the line.
- **As the family comes to the front of the line the helper should ask the children their name/s.** Then when the children meet Santa the helper can introduce them by saying, "Santa, here are Jamie and Susan."
- **The best photos are taken in the first five seconds.** Children in strange situations can often be afraid. Parents should 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.
- **The helper should stay with the parents and keep them to the side until all photography is done.** Do not let the parents move back into the photo area until the children are ready to leave Santa. When Santa is done with the children, allow the parents to collect their children and guide them to the exit area. If all is going well with Santa, you can then move on to the next child or group of children.
- **Santa's helpers should never handle babies or infants.** Even though most helpers love holding babies, this must be left to the parents. A parent should always place their infant into Santa's arms or his lap.
- **Parents with toddlers, and young children up to three or four should be escorted by the helper up to Santa.** Although Santa can usually lift a toddler, it is always safer to have a parent lift the child up onto Santa's lap. This is in case the child gets last minute fears and tries to squirm off Santa's lap. Safety is important!
- **Scared or frightened children take special handling.** If a toddler is afraid of Santa, the parents should hold the child in their arms, with the child facing them, and the child's back to Santa. Have the parent talk to the child, distracting him or her from Santa as they walk up to Santa. The parent should quickly set the child in Santa's lap and quickly back out of the photo area while keeping the toddler's attention with whistles, shouts, or whatever action will distract the child from the fact that they are sitting in Santa's lap. The photographer should then quickly take the photo. (This takes teamwork between, the family, staff, Santa and the Photographer)
- **If there is a newborn to six-month-old baby, have the parent take the baby up to Santa.** Seat other children in the family first and then have the parent take the baby to Santa last. Then let the photographer take the photos. After the photo is taken, the parent can remove the baby and Santa can talk with the other children.
- **Keep the lines moving?** If a family has their own camera, mention to them the event photographer will take the first photo and then the family can take one from the side area. Do not allow the parent to move back in front of the camera until Santa is done talking with the child or children. (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).

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