

Hardy Hints for Santa's Photographer

Guidelines for the Professional Photographer

By National Santa™ Tim Connaghan

The following suggestions come from over fifty years of photo sessions and events with Santa. These are to assist professional photographers in operating or coordinating a photo set with Santa, whether at a mall, private party or community event.

1. **Have a photo set that is flexible** for everything from a photo of Santa with a single child, to full family photos and groups with Santa. Fancy Santa Thrones are nice looking but often not compatible to Santa, and especially if he has to hold a child on each knee. Larger chairs, Love Seats or benches work much better and allow more flexibility for family and group photos. Also, try to keep some space open behind the Santa Chair or bench to allow for adults or even Santa to stand behind the children or guests. And for simplicity a simple straight backed chair with no arms is great. Besides, the focus of the photos is those who you are shooting, not the set!
2. **The best photos are taken in the first five seconds.** A good photographer is always at the ready, prepared to begin shooting the second the child or children enter the set. You never know when the best photo will be taken in the first few seconds. And with today's digital technology, it really does not cost anything extra to take a few extra shots. But the important thing to remember is to be alert and focused on what is happening on the set.
3. **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, if available, can inform or show parents how to take, or sneak their child or children up to Santa and then quickly move to the side so a photo can be taken, often before the child even knows they are with Santa.
4. **A Trained Santa can handle most situations** with children of all ages and from tiny babies to frightened children. However no one visit is the same, and there will always be challenges and possibly something new.
5. **Hands in the Photo.** The photographer sees the whole picture and needs to be observant on how a child, teen or even an adult, sits on Santa's lap. The photographer also needs to make sure Santa's hands are in the photo. Santa should also be looking at the camera or where the photographer tells him to look. Always check the children's clothing. It should be neat and aligned. A child's hands and feet should be in a natural position. You do not want someone coming back later to complain of how the pose looks.
6. **Standing Photos work great for teens and adults.** Often a teen or "tweener," or even an adult is uncomfortable sitting on Santa's knee. If you are flexible, a photo with them stand with Santa sometimes works best. You can also have some fun with adults having them pose giving thumbs-up or other gestures. Make it a fun photo they can put on their Facebook page!
7. **Always address Santa as Santa!** Don't spoil the magic of the event. Even if you know his real name, call him Santa.
8. **Everyone is part of a team.** From Santa, to the photographer, to the event coordinator and 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 what each other's job is. Also, know who do you report to? Who do they report to? Who do you call when you need help?

9. **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. Helpers need to be prepared to answer all kinds of questions from those waiting in line. The might want to have some knowledge of where bathrooms are, and how to direct guests to other parts of the event site.

10. **Do not lift, carry or handle any child.** Even though some photographers and Santa Helpers love holding babies, this must be left to the parents. A parent should always place their baby or infant into Santa's arms or on Santa's lap. 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.

11. **Santa needs hourly breaks.** 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. . It might be good to have some bottled water available to quench his thirst and keep him cool.

12. **Santa may need a fan and more breaks than normal.** Even in the winter months, an indoor event can get quite warm. Especially if the event location gets crowded. Santa is wearing 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, you many need to add more break time

13. **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).

14. **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.

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