

VISITING SANTA SOCIAL STORY

A social story is a way to help a child understand what will happen at an event and to provide them with guidance in advance on how he or she should act or respond. This is an example. The best social stories are tailored to each child by a parent, grandparent or caregiver who knows him/her well.

Santa Claus wears a red suit and has white hair and a beard. Sometimes he wears glasses.

Santa has a loud laugh -- "Ho, Ho, Ho"

Santa loves children.

Santa is very kind.

Santa brings presents to girls and boys on Christmas (or Christmas Eve, etc.).

I am going to visit Santa Claus.

I can tell Santa what I want him to bring me.

I might have to wait in line to see Santa. I need to try to stand still and be quiet in line. I can think about what I want to say to Santa.

Children can sit on Santa's lap or stand next to him to tell him what they want for Christmas. I can sit on Santa's lap or stand next to him or maybe there will be a place to sit next to Santa.

Santa might ask me questions. He might say, "How old are you?". I would answer, "_____". He might say, "Have you tried to be good this year?" I can answer, "Yes."

Mom and Dad might want to have my picture taken with Santa.

I will probably feel excited and happy when I get to talk to Santa.

NOTE: If there are behavioral issues, a parent might want to add more specific directives like:

"I must not pull Santa's beard."

"I must not yell at Santa."

"I must not hit Santa."

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

Parent or caregiver sits on Santa's knee (or next to Santa) with child on lap

Consider having a mailbox where children can just drop off a letter rather than having a face to face visit. Children with autism might be happiest if they can see Santa from a distance and communicate by letter. Some communities have mailboxes for Santa letters, but many do not. Even a non-verbal child can write a letter to Santa by cutting desired items out of catalogs, sorting and pasting them (and the process also provides many opportunities for therapy!) The child can sign his/her name (with hand over hand help, if necessary) and decorate it with crayons, etc.

Children with autism are often echolalic. This may be because they have to repeat what they hear in order to process it. Wait and give them time to answer.

Many children with autism just take longer to make verbal responses. Waiting a few extra seconds may be the most helpful thing to do.

Children with autism generally respond well when, after making allowances for sensory issues, they are treated in the same way as other children.

Many children with autism have food sensitivities. A non-food treat (stickers?) may be a better option than a candy cane.

Even if a child won't do more than look at Santa this year, a good experience this year may mean they participate more next year.

Children with autism are, as a rule of thumb, at a developmental level two-thirds of their chronological age. This means a 12 year old is, developmentally speaking, about 8 years old. That big kid may still be a true believer.