

Smooth Home Visit from St Nick



When Saint Nick Comes to Your Home

Having a Christmas Performer (Santa Claus, Mrs. Claus, or an Elf) come to visit your home is a chance to share some wonderful magic. The kids enjoy dedicated time to really chat without the pressure of a line behind them. You avoid the lines in the mall, take all the photos you want, and create some great memories that will last a lifetime.

So you've booked your Christmas Performer. How exciting! It never hurts to do a little preparation and planning to help create even more magic and make things go smoothly. And while this article focuses on Santa as our example, there are wonderful Mrs. Claus and Elves who also do home visits!

What might happen at YOUR home visit? Every home visit is different, but here are some things you might expect: A special entrance, meet and greet, photos, "chair time" when kids (and adults!) can sit with Santa individually, questions and answer time, and performances such as singing, storytelling, or reading the Night Before Christmas. Then it's time to hand out gifts. Finally, Santa will give everyone a hearty good-bye and make an exit.

Magical Tips for Your Christmas Home Visit

- **Talk with your performer!** This is not their first sleigh ride and often they have a wealth of tips and ideas that can help you. Every performer approaches events differently. And you will have special things in mind as well. Call them, chat, and make certain to finalize your plans before the season is too busy.

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- **Key Details for the Event:** Your performer will need to know how many people will be there and what ages. Be sure to share the names of the children. Santa will do his best to remember them. You can also introduce them simply, *“Santa, this is Suzy who is 7 years old, and Michael here just turned 9.”*

Additional Preparation

- Are there any **Special Needs** considerations? Perhaps one of the children is autistic or grandma is in a wheelchair.
- Are there any **cultural or language** considerations? Could this be a mixed religious household, or are some of the adults non-English speaking?
- Will there be **pets**? Dogs tend to get excited, so it might be best to have them off-stage or provide a handler to control an enthusiastic dog. Remember: No one wants to Santa being chased by a ferocious labradoodle.
- Are there any **access** issues? Is this a gated community? Does Santa need the gate code? Is there a special entrance for Santa?
- **Parking** is important, especially if it is limited (or your house is on a hill). Ask your Santa if they need a space reserved for them. One great method: Have someone park in Santa’s spot, then right before he arrives, pull the car out and leave a sign that says “Reserved for Santa.”
- When you leave **gifts outside for Santa** to load into his bag, put them in a large plastic trash bag that is accessible and mark the bag with a bright ribbon. Santa can pick them up and put them in his bag. If there are MANY presents or they are extremely heavy, get some elf hats and have a few helpers meet Santa outside. Remember, if you cannot carry all the gifts at once, it might be hard to have Santa carry all of them at the same time, too.
- **Don’t count on labels.** Write the name clearly in BIG Marker directly onto the wrapping paper. Labels usually fall off in Santa’s bag. If this is a group gathering, make certain you can distinguish between people with the same name. There may be more than one Grandpa in the room. If the names might be challenging, have someone help Santa with pronunciations.
- If this event includes many families, have a few **small back up gifts**, just in case someone did not get the word. Stuffed animals and gift cards work well. You could even pass them over saying, *“Oh, Santa, you dropped these.”*
- After Santa makes his entrance, he should have a **designated place to sit.** The best kind of chair for Santa is a strong one, preferably with a straight back and without arms. When Santa has someone in his lap, he needs his feet flat on the floor. Often a dining room table chair will work just fine, and you can dress it up with a pretty Christmas blanket (forest green or dark blue look great in photos).
- **Where to put Santa’s chair?** We recommend putting it near the Christmas tree or someplace well-lit with a festive background. Avoid putting Santa near the roaring fireplace: He’s already very warm (cool temps are great). Avoid putting Santa in front of lots of glass: You’ll get flash bounce and glare in your photos. Arrange the chair so the kids can sit down in front of him.
- **What else is going on?** Christmas performing is for the whole family. If it’s too loud or raucous or the music is too loud, some magic will be lost if Santa can’t be heard. While Santa is there, have everybody join in and have your revelers tone it down until Santa heads for the sleigh.

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- **Try to get the photos done early** in the event. That way you have time to get everything you want and folks are still fresh with the wonder of the visit. Then you can relax and just visit!
- There are a couple **ways for Santa to hand out gifts**. One is to just hand them out and open them. Little kids will often just do this anyway. Another fun way is called a “Countdown Out.” Santa hands out the presents but every one waits to open them until Santa is leaving. Santa starts the countdown, “5-4-3-2-1, Merry Christmas!” Then the paper flies! The advantage is that Santa leaves on a high point, and no one tries to follow him out to see the reindeer. In fact, assign someone to make sure the kids don’t follow him outside.
- If you arranged your Santa visit with a split payment (a retainer paid earlier with the remainder due at the time of the visit) or if you want to give you Santa a holiday tip, the best method is to **have the payment and/or tip in the Christmas card** and envelope at the front door, ready to hand to Santa when he comes in.
- **Santa needs the cell number** of someone designated to be **waiting for his text message** that he is ready to arrive at your event. Have this person paying attention, make sure their phone is fully charged, and they are prepared to help if there are any issues.
- **Have all your cameras and smart phones ready**, fully charged, connected to wi-fi, and prepared before the event begins.

Unlikely Things for Santa

- Santa is not likely to tell children they are on the naughty list, even if you ask them to.
- Santa is not likely to eat or drink, beyond a few nibbles or sips. A glass of water is always welcome. However, it might be difficult to keep a beard pristine and white gloves stain easily.
- Santa will not accept any drink that is alcoholic. Remember, he has to drive the sleigh.

Great Ways to Help

- Act as a Host and **introduce people**. Don’t just introduce the kids, Christmas is for the kid in all of us.
- **Help Santa stay on time**. Your Christmas Performer will probably have other visits they need to make that day.
- **Help with the details**. Understand that Santa won’t be able to memorize every name. If you have a tradition, like a special cookie or nicknames or customs, let your Santa know in advance, and again at the event. Maybe remind him “of that time Santa brought something special” if this would be meaningful to the audience.
- **Elf on the Shelf**: If this is part of your tradition, it helps Santa to know the name of those elves and what they have been up to.
- **Reminders of sadness or loss**: If there’s been the passing of a loved one recently or someone is currently stationed overseas, it helps Santa to know, just to avoid touching on issues. And if you have someone missing from the event, Santa could help you record a special message for them.

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- **Encourage participation.** Be upbeat and get everyone to join in on Songs, Stories and so on. If you show enthusiasm, others will too.
- **Coordinate the kids.** As cute as it might be, sometimes it's best not to put all the kids together. The younger, squirmier ones should stay in their parents' laps. If a child is having a meltdown, have someone assigned to help them go somewhere where they can calm down.
- **Photos with pets.** Santa is usually good with pets, but if you want photos with pets, there should be a lap blanket and plenty of advanced notice. If Santa has to visit someone else that day who is allergic to pets, he might not be able to hold your pet for the photo. Instead, he will ask you to hold them and stand or sit nearby.
- **Flexibility for event timing.** Finally, remember that this is a "Visit" and that all performances have their own natural pacing and rhythm. Be flexible and allow the timing to flow naturally.
- Also, if you really enjoy the visit, please send a **great review and give referrals**. And if possible, send them any photos that can be shared. That way, you help support the Arts and make even more Christmas magic possible!

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays!