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November 22, 2010

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## Tips for taking your kids to visit Santa

When you're out shopping this season, you'll see lots of Santas in the mall. It reminds me that the first time I tried to take my kids to visit Santa, they started screaming when we got there, begging me to *not* make them sit on Santa's lap. The same thing happened the following year, even though they were a year older and seemingly Santa-ready (or so I thought).



Visiting Santa should be a fun tradition, but some kids need more prep than others. What can you do to make sure your kids have time and get great Santa photos? Here are tips from Kevin Haislip, a Santa Grapevine, Texas, for parents of kids ages 2 to 5:

- **Talk up the visit to Santa for a few days**, such as: "This weekend going to visit Santa. You can sit on his lap and tell him what you want for Christmas. Santa is really nice." Kids do better when visiting Santa is surprise or last-minute because they get a chance to get used to the big man in a red suit with a white beard can be a bit intimidating to a child. "Even if Santa is jolly," Haislip says. What to wear? "Dress your kids in holiday outfits," Haislip says. "It makes the trip to Santa more of an event and adds to the excitement."
- **Have your child bring something with her**, such as a favorite stuffed animal so she has something familiar (and distracting) to cling to. To reduce the fear factor even more, Haislip recommends sitting down with your child and writing Santa a letter. Have your child give Santa the letter when he arrives.
- **Allow Santa and his elves to do their job**. If your child still doesn't want to sit on Santa's lap, let Santa and his helpers try to coax your child into some playfulness or a candy cane. "We want your child to have a good time and look forward to seeing Santa again later." If that doesn't work, try again another day. It can take time for kids under age 5 to feel comfortable. "I had a 2-year-old girl come to me five times in three weeks and only on the fifth time did she finally sit on my lap. She visited me three times after that all giggly and happy. We became best of friends. The first time it was Christmas Eve," Haislip says.
- **Get ready for a quick pic**. "We get the best photos within the first few seconds after the child sits on Santa's lap," Haislip says. After the photo is taken, then Santa can spend some fun time with your child.
- **Keep your child home if he's sick**. And make sure your child has gone to the bathroom before getting in line.

Most children 6 and up don't have too much fear of Santa and usually are quite ready to see him, Haislip says. But following many of these tips for the older children as well can make the photo op much more memorable.

**On a safety note:** Most malls and department stores that host Santa for children have done rather extensive background checks including drug screening and criminal background investigations. Also, "the organization I work with requires their Santas to sign a 'Morals Clause,' which stipulates that the person playing the role of Santa be above reproach: He is not to be seen going into places that would be questionable, publically inebriated, or flirtatious with women, and is to conduct himself before the public as the public expects to see Santa behaving," Haislip says. For all things Santa, visit Haislip's website at [www.santashope.com](http://www.santashope.com).

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