

Santa Clause 101:

Five Ways To Prepare For A Visit With Santa

During this time of year visits to Santa top the list for many children with special needs. Although the visit is much anticipated, the reality is the experience can be a sensory overload.

WRITE A SOCIAL STORY:

Describe in detail for your child what to expect. Describe the sites, senses and smell of where the visit will take place. Describe Santa in detail and show pictures of his beard. Describe what it may be like sitting in Santa's lap. Read the social story to your child and practice the actual interaction with Santa.

REVIEW SANTA AMERICA CHANNEL VIDEO FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS.

This entertaining and educational video can help you prepare your child for the actual visit: www.youtube.com/santaamericachannel



TAKE PART IN THE NOERR PROGRAMS CARING SANTA VISITS AT SIMON PROPERTY GROUP MALLS ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

At most shopping malls, the line to visit Santa is a busy one, featuring harried parents, eye-catching decorations and festive music. The Noerr Programs intends to tone down the traditionally hectic Santa experience to allow children with special needs to meet Saint Nick on their terms. The locations for the sessions will take place are the Stanford Shopping Center in Palo Alto, Calif.; North East Mall near Fort Worth, Texas; Burlington Mall in Burlington, Mass.; Oxford Valley Mall in Langhorne, Penn.; and Town Center at Cobb near Atlanta, Ga. The Santa areas will be made "sensory friendly" to reduce the distractions that typically trouble autistic children. The music and lights will be turned down. Santa staff and volunteers will avoid loud, sudden movements.

"Caring Santa continues the spirit we started during Easter with the Caring Bunny, fulfilling our dream of providing a comforting and physically accommodating experience for families with children that have special needs," said Judy Noerr, chief executive officer of The Noerr Programs.

The Caring Santa event kicks off Sunday, Nov. 20 at 9 a.m. and continues until 11 a.m. local standard times at Burlington Mall and Stanford Shopping Center, and from 10 a.m. until 12 p.m. at North East Mall and Town Center at Cobb when each mall opens to the general public. Oxford Valley Mall's Caring Santa event will be held Sunday, Dec. 4 from 9 a.m.-11 a.m. Families are encouraged to RSVP prior to the event at www.abilitypath.org. (See Appendix For Information and List of Participating Malls)

FIND SANTA EVENTS IN YOUR CITY THAT CATER TO CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS:

More and more cities and non-profit agencies have created unique Santa times for children with special needs. Check with your local parks and recreation or regional center.

CREATE YOUR OWN SANTA VISITS:

Team together with other parents to create your own Santa visits in your home. The added benefit is you get to control the environment and avoid the crowds at the mall.