

Phil's Forum 12/11/07 Santa – Jolly Old Elf or Disciplinarian?

Santa Claus - jolly old elf or clever disciplinarian trick?

"You better be good, Santa is watching." I love this game played by parents and children this time of year. Heck, I've been guilty of playing it myself. Whoever created that naughty and nice list deserves to be in the parenting resource Hall of Fame. What greater threat is there to hold over your child than Santa not bringing gifts? Cruel? Probably. Effective? Definitely!

Yet, does anyone ever follow through? Are there any parents out there who use this threat then actually decide NOT to get any gifts? Very few. In the end, we forgive our children for their transgressions and shower them with love and lots of toys, delighting in their happy faces, excited cries, and overall joy, putting Santa the Disciplinarian away until next fall.

It's a tried and true tradition of Christmas that has endured longer than I have been alive.

But what if we took a different approach to Santa and his relationship with our kids? Have you ever asked your kids why Santa brings them gifts? They'll probably respond that it's because they've been nice. But still the question stands. Why would Santa make and deliver billions of toys to boys and girls all over the world with no compensation for his troubles? Just because they've been nice? I don't think so. In fact, even some of the naughty kids will get an incredible bounty this year.

The real answer is that Santa gives to teach us to be giving and forgiving. It is possibly the most important lesson you can teach your children - to be giving and forgiving. And it applies not just in December, but all year long. This is the Santa Claus we should be teaching to our kids.

Here are some ways to teach the new Santa to your kids...

Give to Toys for Tots. Become one of Santa's helpers by choosing gifts to give to kids you don't know.

Give to Local Food Banks. The next time you and your kids do some grocery shopping, buy a couple extra items, food that your kids like, not just the dusty old cans of soup in the back of the cupboard from last winter. Make it a habit that every grocery list contains at least one item for the food bank.

Serve a Meal at the Interfaith Shelter or other location that feeds the hungry. Your kids will learn a valuable lesson in humility and generosity by being a servant to those in need.

Be a Bell Ringer for the Salvation Army. Standing in the cold doing a thankless job asking for spare change to make a difference in people's lives can be powerful.

Adopt a Family. If your family has the resources to help pay for someone else's Christmas, do so. Make it a "gift" to the person in your family who has everything by doing it in their name.

Warm the Children. Donate coats, hats and gloves to keep the cold Michigan winters at bay.

Christmas is magical. But Christmas can be hard, too. When money is tight, jobs uncertain, the pressures on a family trying to find joy can be overwhelming. Just remember the true lesson of that jolly old elf - giving selflessly to help others - and you will find that you're already on the "nice" list.

Have a Merry Giving and Forgiving Christmas!

Phil Wrzesinski