

PFA Tips

Is Santa Real? Ummm... We Need to Talk

“What do you mean there’s NO SANTA??? You’ve been LYING to me all these years???” Oh yes, that’s going to be a fun conversation. “Oh and son, while we’re at it, let’s talk about the Tooth Fairy and Easter Bunny...” This will undoubtedly be one of your more unpopular days. So how do you break the news?

Apologize, apologize, apologize

No matter how good your intentions were, you LIED. There is no Santa and you KNEW that all those times you talked about the big jolly one. Yes, you wanted to share the same belief that brought you so much joy when you were a child. But to our kids with Autism, there are RULES. Such as you may not lie. And not only do they believe a great deal of what they are told, YOU said there was a Santa. YOU the parent, the person he trusts NOT TO LIE. Apologize.

It’s like a Disney story

Explain that sometimes as kids we really enjoy stories even if they aren’t real. They still make us feel good. And then we get to an age where we understand the definition of a “fictional” story. Point out that your child enjoys Spongebob and he isn’t real either. Or that he enjoyed Barney as a younger child, and now has outgrown him. (My condolences if you are still plagued by that purple dino.) But reassure them the surprise of gifts will still be part of the celebration. That may soften the blow and change your child’s perspective with the realization that you were the gift-giving hero all those years.

Your job as the “big” kid is to keep the magic going

I know what you’re thinking if you have younger children, relatives, or close friends or neighbors with kids who still believe. I have felt that fear that my son is going to blurt out to them that Santa isn’t real. Explain to your child that the RULE is that it’s his job as the older kid to help keep the magical story going for the younger ones.

“So whose lap was I sitting on????!!!!”

“Don’t talk to strangers. Don’t take food

from strangers. And certainly never sit on a stranger.” This just keeps getting better. I’m going to recommend you go with, “That was someone who was very carefully selected by the mall, who was deemed safe by police background checks, and was approved of by parents, including me.”

Don’t even try the “Santa embodies the whole spirit of Christmas”

That is a beautiful concept. Truly inspirational... to someone who can fully grasp this abstract notion of a Christmas spirit. Not so easy for our more literal thinkers. Maybe liken Santa to a sports team mascot. Santa is the symbol of Christmas, and all that we enjoy about the holiday. But like the mascot, he is a big fun character that represents the team.

Tell them before their classmates do

Imagine if your child has to find out that this gift-giving hero whom he has believed in his whole life is just a myth from **someone else**. If that conversation takes place, you won’t even be there to defend yourself. Take a cue from successful Hollywood PR agents and get out in front of the story. Not to mention, there is the risk that a classmate’s tell-all will include a lot of teasing.

Let’s go with biological age on this one

Raise your hand if you’ve ever said the phrase, “My child is 10, but developmentally it’s more like he’s 6.” So sometimes we make choices based on the intellectual/emotional age we believe our child to be, ignoring the child’s true biological age. But on this topic, I’m going to go with biological age for the reason I just mentioned. By around age 8, their classmates are beginning to figure



out that the story of Santa doesn’t add up. (I’m not trying to set an age-8 mandate here – this is just a guide.) Not to mention I bet 75% of kids that age have discovered a “Santa” gift in the closet. Those kids want to gain approval at school. And what better way than to announce their discovery and show they have outsmarted their parents.

Turn this into a logic-based game

I’m sure we’re all in agreement that this is not a fun conversation. But, there is a way to possibly turn that around. Many of our kids respond well to logic. Autism wiring at its best. Start Googling the physics of Santa Claus and attempt to calculate if a one night world wide trip is possible. If the very thought of attacking that makes your head spin, here’s a cheat sheet. *Santa’s Christmas Eve Workload, Calculated* includes graphs and charts by time zones <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/12/santas-christmas-eve-workload-calculated/249844/>. These are meant to be entertaining, but nonetheless can make for an interesting redirection from the sad news you’re delivering.

Written By Shelly McLaughlin, Director of Safety Programs, Pathfinders for Autism
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