

[Home](#) > [Children](#) > How to make sure Santa isn't a felon



## How to make sure Santa isn't a felon

CHILDREN, CRIME, FAMILY/KIDS, SAFETY

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By [Brette Sember](#)

Going to see Santa at the mall is a holiday ritual for millions of children. But instead of Santa asking your child if he's been naughty or nice, perhaps you'd better ask Santa that question. Turns out, the bar for who gets to wear that cheap department store costume isn't as high as you might hope.

### Santa school

There's no licensing or formal training required to play Santa. The best Santas take their craft seriously and attend conferences or [workshops](#) throughout the year to learn how to apply makeup, put together an outfit, and relate to children.

That sounds reassuring until you learn about [SantaCon](#), which isn't actually a conference at all, but rather an excuse for people to dress like Santa and go on an hours-long pub crawl with drunken revelry, fights, public urination, public lewdness, and other things you probably hope would never be done by that guy on whose lap your kid is sitting.

### Bad Santas

A CBS news reporter recently went undercover and [applied to be a Santa](#) at five malls using the name of a registered child sex offender in Los Angeles. All five malls offered him the job, despite claiming that they did background checks. And a mall Santa in North Carolina was arrested for [child pornography charges](#) earlier this year. It is estimated that 70 out of every 1000 Santa applicants has a felony record. Yikes. Who knows what little Timmy might learn from a Santa like that?

Not only are Santas with records hired regularly, but the behavior of some on-duty Santas would surely be a black mark on that list Santa checks twice. Last year, for instance, [Darnell Kendrickson](#) was arrested for pleasuring himself while sitting in his Santa chair in front of a group of children at a mall in Arizona. A Santa at a mall in Massachusetts was pinched—[for pinching the rear end](#) of his teenaged elf assistant.

### Seeking safe Santas

If the malls and the stores aren't protecting your kid, how do you make sure Santa's not hiding some skeletons in his gift bag? One answer is to take your child to private events run by your church or an organization you belong to (like Scouts or Rotary), where you personally know the Santa or someone who can vouch for him. Some photography companies schedule private photo sessions with Santa in their studios, where you're likely to have more control over what happens. Plus, you can get more information about the Santa's background and won't have to wait in a line with 100 cranky children.

If you want to go to a mall or store, call ahead and ask if they do background checks and how they screen their Santas. You might even want to ask for the name of the Santa scheduled to be on duty and check it against your state's [sex offender registry](#). Getting that name might not be easy, however, as some malls outsource the entire Santa scene to photography companies.

### Is your Santa sanitary?

In addition to the worry about who Santa actually is, there is also the question of what he's wearing and how clean it is. A mall Santa sees about 150 children in a [10-hour shift](#) and is quite likely to have visited with someone who isn't quite potty trained or had a leaky diaper.

Then there are the little ones who have sneezed or coughed right onto Santa's suit and beard. Santa's gloves have likely touched many children, along with the letters and trinkets they bring him. And since most Santa suits are [dry clean only](#), you've got the makings of a hygiene nightmare. The best answer is to have your child sit next to or stand alongside Santa. You can specify that you don't want Santa to touch your child during the visit or photo.

Most Santas are upstanding people who love children and enjoy sharing the magic of the holiday with them. Still, why not exercise a few precautions to ensure that your child's visit to Old Saint Nick is fun and safe?

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### About Brette Sember

[Brette Sember](#) is a former attorney and author of more than 40 books, including *The Divorce Organizer & Planner*, *The Complete Divorce*, *How to Parent with Your Ex*, *The Essential Supervisor's Handbook*, *The Complete Credit Repair Kit*, *The Original Muffin Tin Cookbook*, and *The Gluten-Free Guide to Travel*. She writes often about law, parenting, food, travel, health, and more. She blogs at [PuttingItAllOnTheTable.com](#).

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