

SANTA'S TAKE ON PARENTING



Secrets from
the North Pole

Roland Trujillo



Santa's Take on Parenting

Secrets from the North Pole



Cover design by Jeremiah Trujillo. The Santa and Mrs. Claus image is from a 1919 postcard in the public domain. The story behind its selection is as follows. The Clauses would not allow me to take any photos. Originally our plan was to have a glass of milk and a plate of cookies or perhaps a candy cane on the cover. But one evening around 11:30, as I came down the dark stairs to go to the kitchen for a snack, I saw Santa and Mrs. Claus sitting on the sofa in front of the fire. Mrs. Claus was leaning her head on Santa's shoulder. They were happily looking at old photos one by one. The next morning Mrs. Claus showed me an old postcard they had rediscovered the night before. "We are very fond of it," she said. "In fact, we would like you to use it on the book cover. I like it because it brings back special memories of that time in our lives. Santa likes it because he didn't have to wear glasses back then!"

Santa's Take on Parenting



Secrets from the North
Pole

Roland Trujillo

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This book is dedicated to children everywhere.

“I love these little people; and it is not a slight thing,
when they, who are so fresh from God, love us.”

Charles Dickens

Disclaimer: The information in this book is for educational and entertainment purposes only. The kids and their families portrayed in the book are fictional and any resemblance to any individuals, living or deceased, is purely coincidental.

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Introduction

You can imagine my surprise when I began to notice hits on my website coming from the North Pole. A few days later I received an order for my parenting e-book from someone named S. Claus.

Frankly it was only in retrospect that I put two and two together. The obvious conclusion—that Santa Claus had visited my website and had ordered one of my books—was too fanciful to even think of at the time.

A few weeks went by and then one spring morning in early May around 10:00 AM, I received the phone call that would change my life.

I was sitting at the computer when the phone rang. I finished the sentence I was typing and then answered with the usual “Roland speaking.”

There was a delay on the other end (which I later learned had to do with the distance and phone services involved), and then a booming, deep voice announced:

“Roland, this is Santa Claus. I wish to discuss a project with you.”

Whether it was the hits from the North Pole on my website, the book order from S. Claus, or the warm sincere sound of the voice at the other end, I do not know—but somehow I immediately knew that it was him and no one else.

As if we were old friends, he dispensed with formalities and got down to business right away.

Santa quickly briefed me on the reason for his call. For a long time he had wanted to reach out to parents about some issues he felt strongly about. He searched the Internet for someone who had a concern for children and whose philosophy was, as he phrased it,

“compatible” with his. He announced that he had “selected me.”

“Selected me for what, Sir?” I asked without a clue.

“I want you to visit Mrs. Claus and me at the North Pole for the purpose of getting my take on some parenting issues for the book I want you to write,” Santa said flatly as if it were a foregone conclusion.

I was so surprised by what I had just heard that I stammered and didn’t know what to say. Finally I got my act together and said, “Obviously, I’m very flattered, but I must politely and respectfully decline.”

I went on to give him many logical reasons (and if memory serves me correctly, many illogical ones) why he should find someone else: someone with a big following, someone with more books to their credit, someone younger, someone older, or someone with friends in high places.

When I was done, Santa, who had been listening patiently, said, “no need to say ‘sir.’ Just call me Santa.”

I think I gave him some more reasons to find someone else, but my words were met with the same silence, then: “Would June work for you or is July better?” Looking back on the conversation, I am now embarrassed at how much of Santa’s time I took up.

I was like a kid giving the gym coach all the logical excuses in the world why he (the kid) couldn’t do the cartwheel the coach was asking him to do. The kid would argue he’s not big enough, not old enough, not feeling well, not ready yet etc. etc. But coach made him do one anyway. Later the child would excitedly tell his mom that he had done his first cartwheel in tumbling class. It was a thrilling accomplishment--one that never would have happened if the coach had listened to all of his “valid, logical” excuses.

I was like that kid, telling Santa why I couldn’t do the interview or write the book. By ignoring all my protestations, he was patiently but firmly saying: “You can do it.”

I’m glad he didn’t listen to me.

Well, so much for that. Now I guess I'd better fill you in on a few preliminary details before we delve into the subject matter.

I know some of you are going to ask just exactly where Santa is located. Sorry, I can't tell you.

I had to sign a non-disclosure agreement to not divulge Santa's location. I readily agreed, but frankly the logistics involved in getting there are so complicated that I couldn't tell you his location even if I wanted to.

I will say that everything was otherwise very informal, with one exception. My luggage was thoroughly scanned and I had to take everything out of my pockets for a security person who (I later learned) was making sure that I did not have a camera, cell phone, or GPS device with me.

The interview took place mostly in person. I was invited to the Claus residence near the North Pole for two separate visits, two months apart. Each visit lasted four days. There were also many phone calls and email exchanges

during the process of putting the book together.

I would also like to mention Kylie and Jonathan, two delightful children who you will soon meet in the book. Kylie and Jonathan had actually stayed with the Clauses for a few months a couple of years before my brief visits.

The Clauses were very fond of Jonathan and Kylie and frequently mentioned them. I interviewed Jonathan, Kylie and their mom by phone as part of the book project.

Then, as luck would have it, the Clauses invited Kylie and Jonathan to revisit them at the time of my second visit. It was a great pleasure to meet them in person. I know you will like them too.

I am not allowed to state the dates of my visits or even the year, but I am allowed to say that my visits were during the summer. Fall and early winter are too hectic at the North Pole to leave much time for anything else. After Christmas things do quiet down, but the weather is a bit formidable for someone who is not

used to it, and travel can be kind of iffy. So summer was the obvious choice.

The trips up and back went very well (Mrs. Claus did a wonderful job planning the itinerary, and she had one of her assistants make all the reservations).

I have to tell you that I knew I was going to be in for a great experience from the moment I first met Santa in person.

My trip up consisted of commercial jet, then charter jet, then single engine ski plane, a half hour overland trip by 4-wheel-drive to a helicopter pad where one was ready and warmed up to fly me northwest to a clearing near a glacier. From there I traveled by dogsled.

The dogsled driver left me cold and shivering at a small outpost staffed by two nice gentlemen who were doing some sort of weather research. They knew I was coming, as Mrs. Claus had radioed them to expect me.

They were very cordial, inviting me in to sit by the stove and warm up while I waited for Santa. I could smell some hot coffee brewing.

We were sitting at the small dining table talking about the economy when all of a sudden there was a noise outside that I can hardly describe. It was a tremendous whoosh sound, together with the sound of many small bells, and a then deep voice saying something.

“Santa’s sleigh’s arriving,” they said matter-of-factly.

We put on our jackets, caps and gloves and opened the door. We stepped out into the bright but cold afternoon sunlight.

Santa was standing there, hands on his hips, with a broad smile. “Welcome to the North Pole!” he said in a booming voice.

He was just as I had envisioned he would be, only somehow bigger and more charismatic.

We loaded my bags into the sleigh. “How do you like my rig?” Santa asked, pointing to the large shiny red sleigh and the team of beautiful reindeer.

It was a fantastic rig in many respects. But the thing that really got my attention was that he had bumper stickers. Yes,

bumper stickers! Like “Children are Little People” and “Hugs not drugs.”

“Wow,” I said. “It’s really cool.”

He slapped me playfully on the back, and said “Let’s do it.”

I got in on the passenger’s side and fastened my seatbelt. Santa jerked the reins and commanded each reindeer individually. The sleigh glided forward slowly at first but steadily gained speed. Within a couple hundred yards, the reindeer rose upward and we were airborne!

Santa was very focused, working the reins as we headed due south, ascending to an altitude of about 300 feet. Santa began pulling on the left rein and we banked to the left, making a gradual 180 degree turn. As we made the turn, I saw the weather scientists below waving to us.

I waved a final goodbye as we began a steep climb, now heading due north. I knew I was in for quite a ride.

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Letter Spurs Santa to Speak Out

Santa was pacing back and forth in his office, clutching a letter in his hand.

Every two or three rounds of pacing, he would pause by the window for a few seconds, staring out at the snowy winter landscape, and then start pacing back and forth again.

Mrs. Claus quietly snuck up the stairs. She had heard the creaking of his boots overhead from her rocking chair in the living room where she did her knitting.

She stood by the office door and watched him pacing. Finally, she said in a

gentle voice (so as not to startle him), “What’s wrong, Dear?” (She called him Dear.)

Santa turned and saw the concern in her face. He came over and took one of her hands, putting it between his. He gently patted her hand with his, and with a warm smile, said: “Oh, I guess I just worry too much.”

“What is it?” she inquired. “You’re not having supply problems at the factory again, are you?”

“No,” Santa replied. “It’s today’s parents. I just don’t know what they are thinking.”

He paused for a moment, and then continued.

“I just got a letter from Caitlin, my 7 year old friend in Boston. You know, the one who got an A on her math test . . .”

Mrs. Claus nodded. Her eyes began to twinkle. “She’s the one who asked you to bring an iPad for her mom.”

“Well,” continued Santa, “her mom has been making her stay in her room for 30 minutes at a time,” and then shaking his head sadly, he said, “or even longer!”

“Oh, for heaven’s sake, why?” asked Mrs. Claus.

“Because she didn’t pay attention. Then because she spilled some milk on her dress.” Santa waved the letter in the air and said, “Yesterday she got an hour for interrupting her dad. They told her to stay in her room and make a list of things she will do in the future instead of interrupting, but she was so upset all she could do was cry.”

Then Santa fell silent.

“I’m sorry,” said Mrs. Claus. “She’s such a nice girl. What else did she say?”

Santa sunk in his leather chair. “She said she is angry at her parents, which makes her ‘bad.’ So since she is ‘bad,’ she told me not to bring her anything this year.”

“Oh, no!” said Mrs. Claus.

Santa went to his desk and pulled at a big stack of letters.

“Every one of these letters mentions this new ‘time out’ thing. I’m making a little graph on the computer. I’ve been looking at emails and letters and keeping a careful record of what the children say

about the length of the time outs. Over the past 12 months, the average length of a time out has increased by 6.5 minutes!”

He went back over to his chair and once again sat down in a slump.

Mrs. Claus quietly dusted some crumbs from the computer table. “I’ll make some tea,” she said.

“I wish I could get the word out to parents about how awful these time outs can be.”

“I know,” Mrs. Claus said sympathetically. “But we certainly don’t want parents to go back to spanking.”

“No, we don’t want that,” Santa muttered. “If only they knew that there are viable alternatives which are both effective and fun.”

“You mean like your favorites--huddling, high fives, and hugs?”

“Yes, yes! Precisely,” Santa said forcefully. “But how can I get the word out?”

Mrs. Claus paused at the door.

“Why don’t you contact that nice man Rupert who you talked to yesterday about coming up for an interview? Tell him to

go ahead and start researching the time outs issue. It will help him get a head start. You guys can correspond by email and then talk about it more when he is here next month.”

Santa was lost in thought. But after a few seconds, as if he had just heard what Mrs. Claus said, he stood up and announced:

“I’ll do just that. It’s not Rupert, it’s. . . .
.. Rudolph, no Roland, that’s it.”

He went to the computer. “I’ve got him on my contacts list. I’ll tell him to be sure to write a whole chapter about time outs.”

Mrs. Claus was already on her way to make tea.

* * *

Roland was in his office sitting at the computer. His wife, Sophia, was in the living room.

“Sophia, I just got an email from Santa. He wants me to write a whole chapter on time outs.”

“What did you say, Dear?” Sophia said loudly so her voice would carry down the hallway, around the corner, through the office door and past the earphones Roland had on seemingly all the time.

Roland cupped his hands and yelled: “I got an email from Santa!”

“How’s he doing?” Sophia asked, putting down a book she was reading.

“He’s okay,” Roland said. “He wants me to write a whole chapter on time outs.”

“For or against?” Sophia yelled back.

“Against,” Roland mumbled as he double clicked on his book document.

“And that suits me just fine,” he continued. “I’m not a big fan of time outs either.”

“What did you say?” Sophia asked.

A Short and Informal History of Time Outs

When I was a kid (a long time ago), it was “Go to your room!” This was usually stated with the mandatory obligatory stern voice. Frequently, the parent chose to add an outstretched arm held rigid and horizontal with the index finger pointing toward the room.

There were occasionally additional instructions or warnings issued, and a parent would sometimes add in certain circumstances, “And don’t come out until you are sorry.”

Being banished to one’s room usually ended when the next meal (often dinner, for some reason) was served. The whole family was seated and the guilty party arrived and sat in his or her chair with head down. Food was put on his plate and he was required to eat it. Often there was a conversation between the parents, with the other parent inquiring: “What did he/she do?” The other kids looked at each other and at the parents. They were required to look serious. They were not allowed to giggle.

If mom was the one who carried out the sentence of banishment, then dad, after being briefed on what the child had done, would have to add mandatory additional lecturing or warnings. It was usually something along these lines: “If I ever come home again and find out that you.....(fill in the blank), then I’ll(fill in the blank with some punishment administered by him personally).”

There were many variations of the above scenario, some involving an argument flaring up between the parents. If the infraction occurred in the evening, then it was “brush your teeth and go to bed.”

But there was always a happy ending. When the meal was over, it was usually back to business as usual. And don’t forget--way back then in antiquity, most families had four, five, six, or more kids. So it wasn’t long before another sibling did something wrong, and what the original guilty party did was quickly forgotten as attention was now focused on the new offender.

When the evening variation (“brush your teeth and go to bed”) was implemented, it often ended with the door opening and a parent quietly coming to sit down on the edge of the bed. There was a gentle admonishment, followed up by being tucked in with perhaps a good night kiss.

Let me say a word about the daytime version of the banishment to one’s room. As a kid, I considered it a punishment only if there was something good on the television that I would miss, or if the other kids got to go outside and play.

Otherwise, frankly, and especially for the only child, being sent to one’s room was often a welcome relief. Since there was no assigned duty to perform, I looked at my baseball cards or listened to the radio. Plus my mom couldn’t keep yelling at me when I was in the safe haven of my room.

The next evolution of “go to your room” was the addition of mandatory stern preconditions and warnings.

For example: “Don’t come out until your homework is done. And don’t let me catch you looking at your baseball cards or listening to the radio.” Still, the punishment was manageable; although it did become dicier when “just wait till your dad gets home” was added.

Those were the good old days. Now things are different.

The go-to-your-room card parents used to play is apparently no more. Today it’s “time outs.”

The trouble is: there is no sense of humor in these new time outs. It’s like zero tolerance. It’s a power play, but one in which the parent admits inadequacy and compensates with a combination of avoidance and arbitrariness.

To be fair, it must be stated that there is one big thing that time outs have in their favor—they replace spanking. I will be the first to admit that I am glad to see the change in attitude toward spanking. Today spanking is generally frowned on.

I am opposed to spanking, and so I am glad that many, if not hopefully, most parents are not spanking their kids. I, for one, don’t want to go back to the days of spanking anymore than I want a return to smoking in offices and restaurants.

I don’t approve of spanking, period. I’m also not a fan of “go to your room.” But as far as alternatives go, I just can’t get comfortable with time outs.

“Okay, Roland,” some of you are saying, “we get it. We understand that you are uncomfortable with time outs. Now please tell us why you don’t like time outs.”

First, let me say that I am on your side. I want you to succeed and I want to empower parents. That's one of the reasons why I've had to rethink time outs. I can see that time outs actually disempower parents. Here's why.

The most powerful force on earth for good is love. If you don't believe me then just ask Santa. Think back to when someone withdrew their love by shunning, rejecting, or growing cold toward you. It felt terrible, didn't it? What the parent has to remember is that being sent away to one's room to be alone and separated from the parent may feel like the parent is withdrawing love.

Chances are you may just be trying to de-escalate a situation by sending the child to their room. But to the child, it may be interpreted as "you don't love me." It may also be interpreted as "I am a bad person and made mommy so angry she can't deal with me anymore."

As a parent, you have a natural bond with your child. If love comes through this bond, then it is a powerful builder of self-esteem, security, confidence, hope, and self worth in the child. When it is absent, or *appears* to the child to be absent, it breeds fear, self-deprecation, insecurity, and low self-esteem.

To the child, being sent away at the drop of a hat feels like being shunned or even rejected. Some children will grow hard and inured to it. They will hate the parent and grow callous. The time out will mean nothing to them anymore, other than reaffirming a reason to hate the parent.

But before the child grows cold and indifferent, many children will experience big time separation anxiety. As previously stated, they may feel shunned and rejected.

Another problem is that the time out often includes instructions to the child to come up with some strategy or plan to better handle the situation in the future. Many kids, and especially little kids, just don't have the resources to do this by themselves. They need a parent to be there to help them with this task and guide them in the process. That's what a parent is for.

Without a parent's help in coming up with a plan, it only increases a child's anxiety. In fact, the whole time out thing can drive kids to one of two extremes: some become hardened; others become more timid, insecure, and fearful.

A final point--remember how I said that time outs dis-empower the parent? I showed how time outs disconnect parent and child, putting a physical and emotional distance between parent and child. In today's day and age, the *last* thing you want to do is put any impediment in the connectivity between you and your child.

The second reason why it is dis-empowering is this: children desperately and deeply need to see their parent as calm, as competent, and as able to handle things. A parent who sends the child off in time outs is literally saying: "I can't cope, I can't deal with you, and I can't help you. Go away and figure it out for yourself."

Could there be some other options—options that avoid the extremes of neglect, punishment, and permissiveness?

Could there be problem solving solutions that promote and foster connectivity and engagement, facilitate communication, and build, instead of threaten, bonds?

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Santa's Take on Time Outs

“Hellooooooooooooo,” the cheerful resonant voice boomed from the other end of the line.

“Hello, Santa, how are you?”

“Fine, fine.”

I could picture Santa sitting in his leather chair, with his shoes off and his feet on the ottoman. He undoubtedly had on his red, green, and white striped socks which always appear to be about three sizes too big.

“Santa,” I said, pausing to shuffle my notes, “we need to discuss the book.”

“Go ahead,” said Santa.

“I’m going to be honest with you. A lot of parents rely on time outs. And frankly, it is often recommended to them. Their thinking is that a time out is better than a spanking.

“I know you are not a fan of spanking,” I continued. “I’m with you there. You and I are also on the same page about the potential drawbacks of time outs. I believe that time outs suggest that the parent can’t cope, and this undermines a child’s confidence in the parent.

Secondly, I think that time outs harden some kids while making others fearful and insecure. That’s why I just don’t think they are the answer.”

“Yes, yes,” Santa said.

“But,” I said tentatively, “having said all that, I know that many parents rely on them. These parents are going to ask you, ‘if we don’t spank and we don’t do time outs, then what should we do?’”

“Of course,” said Santa. “That’s why I called you to write the book. I’m going to tell you! Why, we haven’t even scratched the surface yet.”

I have to admit I gave a tremendous sigh of relief. Santa, as usual, was two steps ahead of me.

Santa laughed, and I know his eyes were twinkling.

“As soon as you arrive, I’ll give you my take on time outs.”

Time Outs Santa Style

Santa, Mrs. Claus, and I sat in silence for about three minutes. Then we all began to speak at the same time. It was really funny. We all laughed heartily. It was a great tension breaker.

Then another 30 seconds of silence followed by another round of laughter.

“Look at us! We’re supposed to be these great communicators, and here we are sitting around like bumps on a log!” Mrs. Claus said jokingly.

“Dear,” she said, “why don’t you tell Roland about huddles, hugs, and high fives?”

“Yes, please, tell me more,” I added.

“It’s simple,” said Santa. “Parents just need to tweak their time outs. You see,

I'm not really opposed to time outs, but mine are only 60 seconds or 2 minutes long at the most."

Santa sat back contentedly, as if he was waiting for me to be surprised and impressed by what he said.

But I just sat there with a puzzled expression on my face.

Santa took pity on me, laughed, and asked, "Do you watch basketball?"

"Yes," I said tentatively.

"Do you know what a time out is in basketball?"

"Yes," I said. Now the light was beginning to dawn. "You mean, when you have an issue with your kids, you call a time out like in a basketball game?"

"Now, you're cooking," Santa said.

"And your time outs last 60 seconds or 2 minutes?"

"You got it," Santa said.

"What do you do during the time out?"

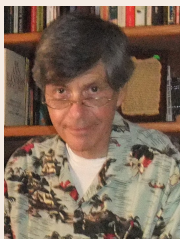
Santa looked at me as if I were kind of dumb.

"You huddle," he said. "And you quickly make a plan, and the kids help you make the plan."

SANTA'S TAKE ON PARENTING

Santa Claus has finally spoken on the subject of parenting. Who is better suited to give advice than the one who has brought joy and delight to children for as long as anyone can remember? In this fictional account, Santa commissioned author and lecturer Roland Trujillo to publish this book after granting an interview with him at the North Pole. What are “time outs Santa Style?” How does Santa handle discipline and communication issues? What’s on Santa’s do’s and don’ts list? What is Santa’s secret to making chores fun and easy? What does Santa say to parents about getting off to a good start? You’ll find the answers to these questions and more in this book, destined to become a classic. Roland’s new book is a Santa story for grownups with many teachable moments. Your kids will listen when you say “Santa says.”

Roland Trujillo, author and educator, introduces his new book about successful parenting. For over 20



years, Roland has been counseling and coaching parents and caregivers in building loving family relationships. Roland founded the Center for Common Sense Counseling in 1990 and hosts a popular AM radio program. His new book is for parents, grandparents, kindred/foster care providers and anyone who loves children.