



*Opportunities for Santa to
Help Children in Special
Circumstances*

Tips on Creating Meaningful Visits



Who Am I?

- John Scheuch
- 40 years as Santa
- Made my first bereavement visit in 2001 – no preparation
- Made first Hospice visit in 2002
- Joined Santa America in 2005 (founded in 2004)
- Did Special Needs presentation in Branson in 2006
- Work with all special needs children
- President – Santa America since June 1, 2016

A festive winter night scene. In the upper half, Santa Claus is shown flying in a sleigh, pulled by a team of reindeer. The sleigh is illuminated from within, and a bright light emanates from the front. The reindeer are depicted in mid-flight against a dark blue, starry sky. In the lower half, a snow-covered town is visible, with houses and trees. The houses have warm lights glowing from their windows, and the trees are bare and covered in snow. The overall atmosphere is cozy and celebratory.

Topics to be Covered

- Hospice
- Bereavement
- Chronic issues
 - Autism
 - Intellectually Challenged
- Acute issues
 - Cancer
 - Leukemia
 - Other long term treatment protocols
- Post-Traumatic Stress
 - Children of Wounded Warriors
 - Children that are victims of violence or natural disaster



Challenges to Making Hospice Visits

- Survey in 2006 showed reasons for not doing Hospice calls
 - Saying the wrong thing
 - “Losing it” emotionally
 - Not having the right thing to say
 - Feeling inadequate
 - Why can’t you do a miracle
 - Family dynamic
 - Having nothing to say
 - How do I enter?



Tips for Hospice Visits

- Be a Hospice volunteer
 - Visit with adults and talk about death
 - Exercise your emotional muscles
 - Practice
- Learn what you can before your arrival
- Be “In the Moment”
- Focus on the child
- Silence is okay
- Be prepared for the hard question

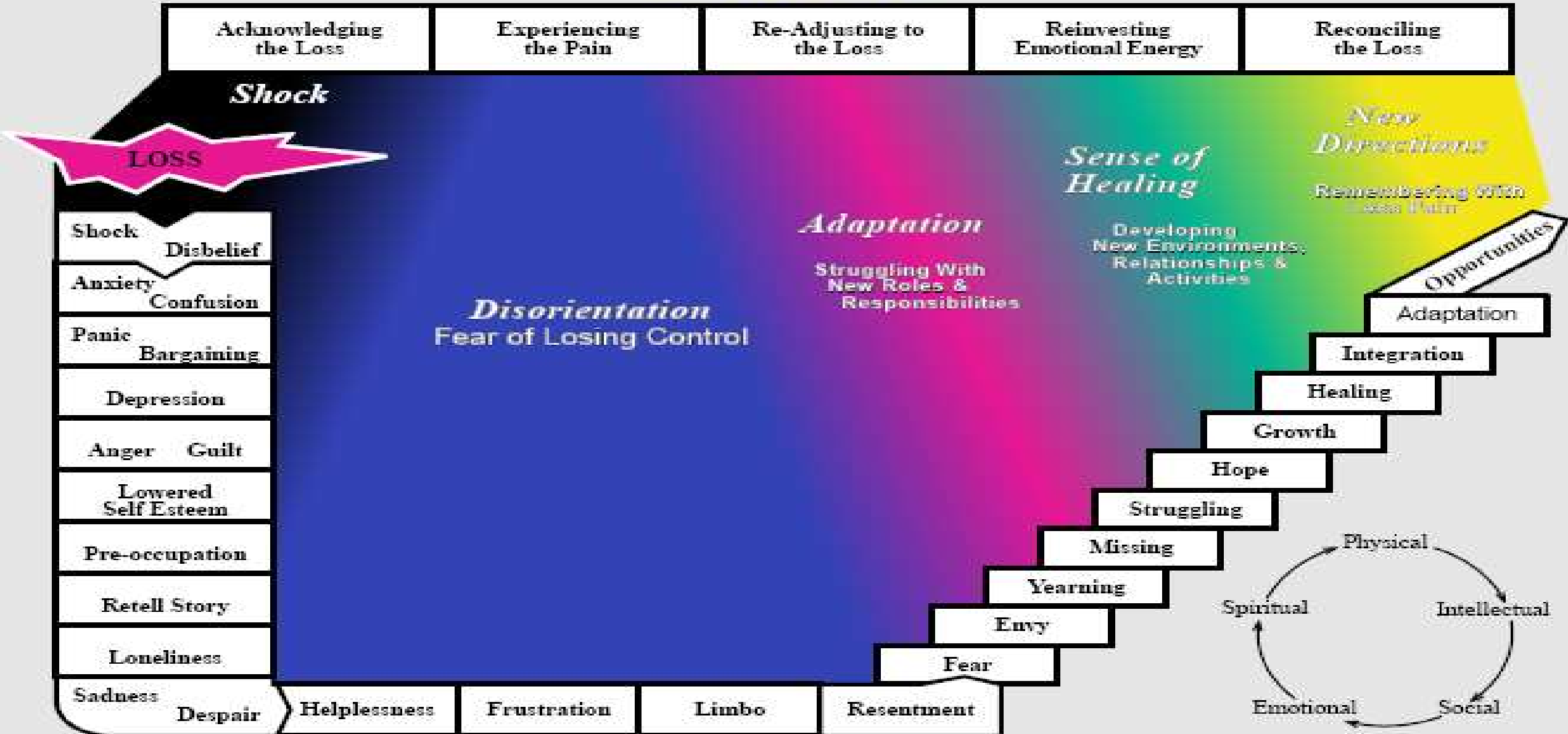
A festive winter night scene. In the upper half, a sleigh pulled by a team of reindeer flies across a dark blue sky filled with falling snow. A bright, glowing orb is visible in the sky behind the sleigh. In the lower half, a row of snow-covered houses with warm lights glowing from their windows is visible. The overall atmosphere is serene and celebratory.

Bereavement

- Visiting Children who have lost a loved one
 - Acknowledge the loss
 - Ask what they most liked to do with the person they are grieving for
 - Ask how they will remember their loved one
 - How will they celebrate that persons life
 - Follow the child's lead. If they become too upset, change the subject
 - Come back to the topic if it is appropriate later on
 - Children grieve differently than adults
 - And we all handle grief differently

The Experience of Grief

Jack LoCicero, Ph.D.





Children on the Autism Spectrum

- What is Autism?
 - A group of complex neurodevelopment disorders characterized by repetitive and characteristic patterns of behavior and difficulties with social communication and interaction.
- How many have visited children on the spectrum?
 - What was the setting?
 - Did it go well?
 - Were you aware in advance?
 - How did you prepare?

Autism Visits

- Learn what “triggers” a child might have



A festive winter night scene with Santa Claus flying in a sleigh pulled by reindeer over a snow-covered town. The scene is illuminated by a full moon and the lights of the town below. The reindeer are pulling the sleigh across the sky, and the town below is covered in snow with lit-up windows and trees.

Autism Visits

- Learn what “triggers” a child might have
- Learn how they communicate
 - I-Pad, story board, speaking, non-speaking, ASL
- Try to arrange by appointment so there is no extended wait time
- Choose a small, calm, quiet setting
- Start slow and low
 - Do not be a sensory tsunami
 - Minimize chance for sensory overload
- Autism is about trust, so you must develop trust with the children
 - Refer clients to Santa America video on You Tube

A festive winter night scene. In the upper half, Santa Claus is seated in his red sleigh, pulled by a team of reindeer flying through a dark blue, starry sky. A large, bright full moon is visible in the background. In the lower half, a row of snow-covered houses with warm lights glowing from their windows is visible. The overall atmosphere is magical and celebratory.

Acute Care Visits

- Could be in Hospital or Home
- Always remember you are visiting a child, not cancer or leukemia
- Be prepared for the request “ I want to get better”
 - This is where previous practice helps
- Don't ignore the situation, but don't dwell on it
- Appropriate touches can help if the agency allows it.
 - Make sure in advance what the rules are
- Know HIPAA regulations regarding privacy



Post-Traumatic Stress - Military

- Children in Families with Wounded Warrior and Military Families
 - Stress of Deployment
 - Pre-Deployment
 - During Deployment
 - Awaiting return home
 - Homecoming
 - Homecoming with Injury
 - Wounded Warrior that can not return to Active Duty
 - Relocation
 - Children lose their support system
 - What is a constant?

A festive winter night scene. In the upper half, a sleigh pulled by a team of reindeer flies across a dark blue, starry sky. The sleigh is filled with people, and a bright full moon is visible in the background. In the lower half, a row of snow-covered houses with warm lights glowing from their windows is visible. The overall atmosphere is magical and serene.

Post-Traumatic Stress - Violence

- May find these children in a Battered Women's Shelter or Foster Care
 - Witnesses or victims of violence or abuse
 - May not trust strangers
 - May not want to engage at all
- Let the children be the guide
 - Do not force the interaction
- Keep it light
- Use a trusted family member as a surrogate

A festive winter night scene. In the upper half, a sleigh pulled by a team of reindeer flies across a dark blue, starry sky. The sleigh is filled with gifts and is lit from within. Below, a row of snow-covered houses with warm lights glowing from their windows is visible. The overall atmosphere is magical and celebratory.

Post-Traumatic Stress – Natural Disaster

- Must wait for First Responders to clear the area
 - Location must be safe
 - All initial issues must be handled
- Work through local agencies to determine the services needed
 - Could be Red Cross, Salvation Army, local church
- Lone Star Santas have a program and outline to follow
 - Contact Santa Jim Fletcher or Santa or Santa Doug Portwood for details

A festive winter night scene. In the upper half, Santa Claus is shown flying in a sleigh, pulled by a team of reindeer. The sleigh is filled with gifts, and Santa is holding a glowing orb. The reindeer are running through a dark blue, starry sky. In the lower half, a snow-covered town is visible, with houses and trees illuminated by warm lights. The overall atmosphere is magical and celebratory.

Santa's Guidelines

- Be Informed and Prepared
- Practice
- Be in the Moment
- Stay in character - Don't fall apart
- Bring up the issue of death, in measured steps
- Honor religious beliefs
- Be sincere
- Be good listener
- Be comfortable with quiet

A festive winter night scene. In the upper half, Santa Claus is flying in a red sleigh, pulled by a team of reindeer. The scene is set against a dark blue night sky with a full moon and falling snow. In the lower half, a snow-covered town is visible, with houses and trees illuminated by warm lights from the windows. The overall atmosphere is cozy and celebratory.

How do you Relieve your Stress?

- It is okay to show emotion, preferably after the visit
- Talk to your spouse or significant other
- Talk to other Santas that have experience
- Talk to a pastor or other spiritual advisor
- Talk to the coordinator of your visit
- Share your story without identifying details



Santa's Simple Rules

- Rule #1 – It's about the children.
- Rule #2 – If there is a question or a problem, please see Rule #1.

Loving and
taking care of
children is the
rent I pay for
living on this
planet.

