

12 Tips For Getting Better Family Photographs



Compliments of:



Professional Photography for
People Families Pets
Seniors Models Events
Weddings Architecture

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INTRODUCTION

At every family gathering there is at least one person taking pictures, usually more than one. If you are one of those people, the ideas in this booklet are for you. While everyone else is getting snapshots you can be the one who gets the photos everyone wants copies of.

Many of today's cameras are described as being "Point & Shoot" cameras and that is how most people use them. Unfortunately, in most cases the pictures that result are OK snapshots but nothing to get really excited



about. With just a little planning and a few simple Do's and Don'ts it will be much easier to get the kind of pictures you are really proud of.

The pages that follow contain 12 suggestions to help you take better family

photographs. You don't need to remember them all or include every one on every picture you take. They are not "rules" that must be followed. They are ideas about



how to get good pictures in different situations. If you use just one idea in most of the pictures you take, you will start to get better pictures very quickly. At times when you can actually plan how you are going to set up a shot you may want to combine 2 or 3 of these ideas.

The more often you can include these suggestions in how you take photos the easier it will become to use them regularly. None of them are complicated or highly technical. They are simple, easy to use suggestions that will help get more enjoyment from taking pictures and seeing the results you get.

The most important part of taking photos is to **HAVE FUN.**

GET IN CLOSE Tip #1

The quickest way to improve the family photos that you take is to get in close on your subject. Whether it is one person or a group, try to fill the frame as much as possible with your subjects, and especially their faces.

You can fill the frame either by getting physically closer to the subject or by using the zoom feature on the camera, or both. In family photos, background is normally the enemy. The things that surround and are behind your subject are not normally what you are trying to photograph. It is (usually) the people that you want to capture.

Background and surrounds are normally a major distraction from what you want the photo to show. If you take a shot of two people laughing together from across the room, most of the finished scene in the print will be of the wall behind them, part of the lamp on the table next to them and half of one of the kids sitting on the floor in front of them and none of these things add to image that you want to show in the final print.

Most of today's consumer cameras have very wide angle lens and therefore capture a very broad image. That is great for

scenic pictures on vacation but really works against you when you want to take photos of people. The camera's zoom feature will help you cut out unwanted background but probably will not be enough. You will need to get close also.

I suggest for photos at family events keep your camera set on the maximum zoom all the time. This will get help you get tighter shots right from the start. As you are framing a shot in the viewfinder continue to move in close to your subjects until they fill the frame, then shoot.



After the event, look at your photos critically. Out of 24 images how many could have been shot even closer than they were? How many were too tight? My guess is that the first time or two you try this, there will be very few if any, that were shot too tight.

How tight you want your shots is up to you as the photographer. The main idea in this context is to have you think about how tight the shots are. Normally, closer is better but not always. It is up to you to judge. Try shooting very tight and adjust how you shoot in the future depending on how you like the results.

GO VERTICAL Tip #2

All of today's cameras that I am aware of take photos that are wider than they are high. Held level you subject will fill the frame from top to bottom before it will side to side. That means that a normal shot of one or two people with the camera level will include background in nearly half of the frame. The result will be a very distracting image.

For "People Pictures" turning the camera up on edge vertically will normally give you much better results. Family pictures are normally centered on people and people are taller than they are wide (usually, although many families have on or two exceptions to this rule!). By turning the camera up on it's side as you shoot you will be better able to fill the frame with your subject and eliminate unwanted background.

The more you can eliminate background from your photos the better you will like them. As I have said, background is the enemy in most family photographs. It is a distraction from what you really want to capture. By turning the camera up on edge to shoot you are controlling what you allow in the image and you are focusing the viewer's attention on the subject.



When you are shooting family pictures outdoors, avoid direct sunlight! Yes, that is what I said, avoid direct sunlight. Most people think that you want to shoot outside on a sunny day with the sun coming over the photographer's shoulder onto the subjects. Wrong, wrong, wrong!

You need light to make a photograph there is no doubt, but too much of a good thing causes problems. Everything in moderation, right?

Bright sun causes a number of problems in photographs. First of all, it forces your subjects to squint to protect their eyes. Second it causes bright reflections on light colored areas such as subjects faces, light colored clothing and it lights the background (the enemy, remember) as well as it does the subject.

Have you ever noticed how those summer shots at the beach look washed out and over-exposed. It is probably because they were shot in the bright afternoon sun.

When you want to shoot photos outdoors on a sunny day try to find some open shade to shoot under. Because of the bright sun

around you, you will have plenty of light to make the image but the subjects will be more attractively lit and you won't get bright white reflections from all the light colored areas in the image.

If you don't have a shaded area available try to wait for a passing cloud to break the full power of the sun. If you can't even get any help from a cloud or two try to shoot into a dark background such as foliage or a dark colored wall. This way the finished photo is less likely to be totally washed out by an extremely bright background.

If you have no choices at all except bright sun everywhere and you want to get the shot in spite of the conditions, turn you subjects so they are not facing directly into the sun. Try to arrange the shot so you are shooting with the sun at somewhat of an angle from the side. This will reduce the number of very bright reflections bouncing back to the camera. Also try to have your subjects avoid white or light colored clothing that tends to become severely over-exposed very easily.

"Because of the bright sun. I took the model into a shaded play area where this image was shot."



Small children and pets are especially hard to photograph because they never seem to stop moving. It is very difficult to move in close and fill the frame with the subject when the subject is a moving target!

A containment device is an especially effective way to keep those active subjects in one spot long enough to get the picture you want. No, you don't need to tie them down or put restraints on them! Simply give them a box to play in or surround them with toys. Boxes, baskets, a wash tub or any other large container can work well. If you can't put them in something put them ON something. A small child on a large chair can make a great shot as they explore the arms and cushions. You might also try putting them on very large stuffed animal.

Even surrounding them with interesting toys and objects will hold their attention long enough for you to get a shot or two taken. When you are working with small kids the greater selection of containment tools and attention getters you have available the better your results will be.

Pets are much the same. Containment toys such as boxes and baskets will distract

them momentarily while you catch their photo. Even something they can jump out of easily will usually slow them down long enough to get a picture. In some cases it may interest them enough to create a cute pose or two.

The main idea here is to focus their attention on one spot for a moment or two so that you can get the photos you want. It may take five or six tries with different objects to find one or two that work but giving your "moving target" something to focus on will be a valuable tool for you.

"The Puppy was quick to jump out of the clay pot. I finally got this portrait on the 6th try."



BE READY
Tip #5

Many times the best expressions and most natural moments come just after you take the picture! Be ready to shoot again immediately after you press the shutter the first time. Most people are very aware of having their picture taken and will relax after you shoot, that may be your best chance to get a really good picture of them.

You have finally gotten the whole family arranged for annual group shot and everyone puts on their standard "I'm Smiling" smile and you take the shot. As soon as they hear the camera click, they relax a little and someone in the back row jokes about family pictures and everyone laughs, that is the picture you may really want. Be ready and catch that one too.

This is especially effective with kids, particularly if you are really posing them. Once you take the posed picture they will do something, who knows what. Be ready and take two or three more shots after that first one and you will have a great chance to get the really natural picture that you want from your flash.



"Neither of these images are the ones I had posed the kids for. Each was captured a few seconds after the planned picture was taken. Both are more natural than the original planned shot."



Adults are generally fairly tall and kids are, by nature, short! If you shoot family pictures standing up you will miss to your best way to get "Kid" pictures. When you are taking photos of kids and pets, get down on their level. If you want to get really good family photos be ready to shoot kneeling, sitting, or laying on the floor.

If kids need to look up at you to be photographed, they will stop doing whatever it is that caught your attention to begin with. When you want to get natural photos of kids and pets you will get the best results shooting from their level.

By being at the same level as your subjects you will not need to have them look at you



to get good photos. You can simply take a number of shots of them as they do whatever

catches their attention. It may seem like some extra work but shooting from the same level as your subjects will be worth it.

The same is true for adult subjects. If your

subjects are seated, kneel down so you are shooting from the same level as their eyes. If your subjects are standing but are shorter than you bend or crouch down so, again, you are shooting from the same level as their eyes.

Having said all that, the opposite side of this photo tip is to move around and experiment with shooting from a variety of angles. Shooting from the sides of your subjects will give a different perspective. You can shoot down towards your subjects and in some cases get good results. In most cases shooting up towards the subject is not the most flattering angle to shoot from unless you are trying to capture some very creative results for a particular purpose.

Another method to add interest to your photographs is to rotate the camera at different angles. Not only horizontal or vertical but varying angles as well. Again it changes the perspective for the viewer and may add interest to the shot.

As a general rule, for the most natural and attractive photos, try to make sure you are shooting from the subjects eye level. After you have gotten those shots experiment and have fun. You may get some images that are plain bad but you will also get a few that are creative and interesting.

FLASH & SHADOWS Tip #7

One of the most annoying and distracting parts of family pictures when flash is required is dark shadows that are visible behind the subject. Any light will create shadows and on camera pop up flash units many times create very harsh shadows.

If the situation requires that you simply must use the pop up flash on your camera there are a couple things that you can do to minimize these nasty shadows.

The first is to move your subject away from any background surface. If you are photographing a person against a white wall try to move them out to 5- 6 feet away from the wall. The further they are from the background surface, the softer the shadows will be.

An even better way is to move the subject to an area with darker background surfaces. The darker surface will make the shadows less noticeable. Again, try to not have your subject close to the surface.

In this case also, the background is the enemy. The more you can do to minimize the background in the shot, the less problem you will have with harsh shadows.



"Even though this was shot outdoors, flash was used to balance the amount of light."



"The first shot of this series was Ryan sitting on the basket. I caught this as he played getting on and off the basket."

ARMS & ANGLES Tip #8

When you are taking family photos and asking your subjects to pose for the shots, make a very real effort to arrange the poses so that they are made up of angles and not squares.

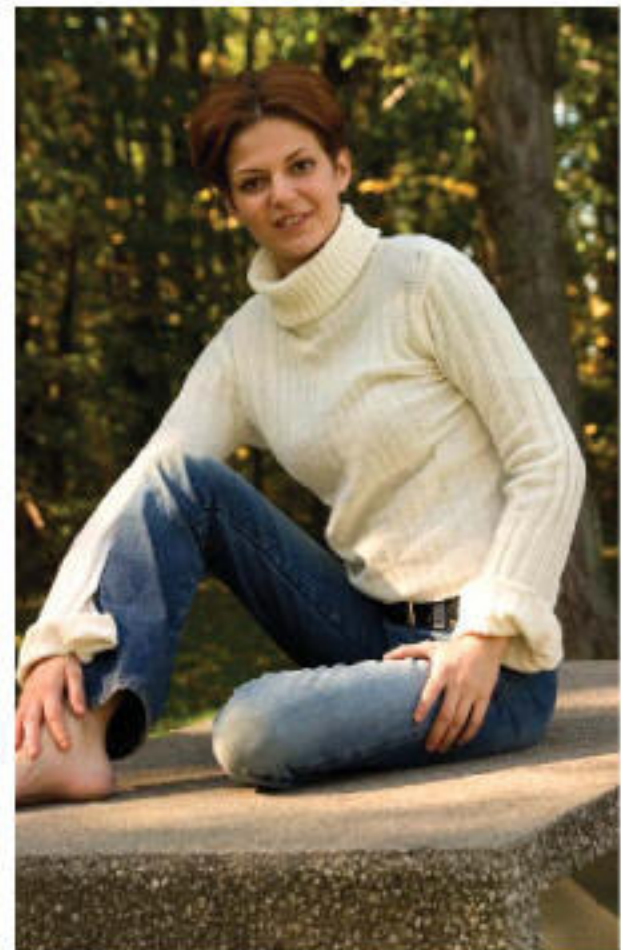
Have your subjects turn their bodies so that they are not square to the camera. Move the subject's arms so they are not straight down at their sides. A hand partially in a pocket or on the hip will create an angle between the body and the arm. Posing your subject so the shoulders are at different heights will add further interest to the shot.

When posing groups, try to arrange the group so that people's eyes are at different heights from others in the group. You will find it is better to arrange groups in bunches, not lined up in a row. This makes it easier to keep all your subjects at different levels and also makes it easier to fill the frame with their faces rather than including all those long legs.

If your photo includes elbows, knees, and wrists make sure that the joints are flexed slightly and not straight. Even hands can be posed to add to the finished image. Turn your subject's hands so that you are not seeing the full back of the hand straight on.

Pose the fingers so they are slightly bent and relaxed and try to avoid closed fists.

The best photos are made up of angles and bunches, not straight lines. The more you can do to avoid straight lines in individual poses and in group shots the better your family photos will be.



BACKLIGHT

Tip #9

Try to avoid shooting family photos where there is a bright light or reflective background behind your subject. The most common case is shooting a subject whose back is to the sun. The background is the brightest part of the picture and the subject ends up very dark or a silhouette. Another common case is shooting a photo of someone in the shade with the full sun on a white sand beach behind them.

Turn your subject away from the bright background. The lighting of your subject and the background should be even or with the background darker than the subject. If you can not avoid the backlight situation, turn on your camera's flash and shoot as you would indoors. This allows your flash to balance out the bright background and fill in the dark subject with light.



"Flash was used to balance the bright light coming through the window behind him."



"The reclining set-up of the family provided a diagonal pattern through the image and put everyone's eyes at a slightly different level."

BACKGROUNDS Tip #10

What may or may not be in the background of your photos will make or break how the picture looks. Most cameras take a rectangular image and the subject in family photos is never a rectangle, therefore there will always be something in the background.

If it is a busy street scene or a cluttered kitchen counter it will detract from the photo you want. As the photographer, if you are aware of the background of a shot and try to control it you will get better photos.

If you want to take a photo of your child playing on the floor look at what you see around the subject in the viewfinder. If you can see part of the couch, table leg and your husband's foot they will all be distractions in the finished print.

Number one, be aware of what is in the background and look for easy ways to control what is included in the shot. In the example above, it may be that by moving two feet to one side you can eliminate the table leg and your husband's foot from the shot and shoot your child against just the front of the couch. It still may not be perfect but it will be better than a shot with a lot of clutter in the background.

Anytime you are planning on taking pictures look at your surroundings and consider different backgrounds. What areas would work the best and what areas should you avoid. Look for areas that have are slightly dark and don't include a lot of lines or distinctive objects. If you expect to be using flash in your shots try to avoid shooting directly at a flat surface that will reflect the center of the flash. Shoot at an angle to the background in that case.

The background is only there because your subject is not the same shape as the image your camera captures. The background very seldom adds to the picture you are taking but it can detract greatly. Move in close to eliminate as much background as possible and try and control what is in the background to eliminate distractions in your photograph.



VACATION PICTURES Tip #11

When you want to take a picture of your children in front of the Eiffel Tower don't try to include the entire tower in that picture. Take a shot of the kids sitting on a sign that says EIFFEL TOWER and includes a very small part of the base of the tower behind them. Then move back and take a great picture of the tower itself.

Scenic photos with people in them are almost impossible to do well. In most cases you will get better results if you don't try to do two things at once. If you want to have a photo of your husband by the Grand Canyon hold the camera horizontal, move in close so you get a good image of him and place him somewhat off center in the shot so you can see a small part of the canyon in the background, but make it a photo of him. Then take whatever style of scenic pictures that you like of the canyon.

If you try and get a shot of him and a broad vista of the canyon he will be so small that he becomes a foreground distraction from the scenic image. The result is you don't have a good photo of him and don't have a great scenic photo either.

Vacation pictures are usually best taken as

as separate subjects. When you want people, take great people pictures with your subjects as the main focus. When you want scenes and vistas don't bother to include people. In both cases you will get better photos.



Family photography is great fun. In today's world of digital cameras it is easier to take great family pictures than ever before. One of the best ways to get great family pictures is to take a lot of them. The more you take the better you will get.

Take time to really look at the pictures you have taken critically. Of the ones you like try and identify what it is about them that you like. Look at the ones you don't like as well. If you can decide why you don't like them you can avoid taking more shots like them the next time.

The tips I have included for better family pictures are just that... tips and suggestions. They are not rules. Experiment. Try other ideas of your own. Take lots of pictures and you will get more that you really like.

If you get a chance, watch a professional photographer while he works. He will take a ton of images when all he may really need is one or two. A pro will shoot the same image from a variety of angles and distances. He will stop and look at the shot without the camera and then he will take some more images to get a different look. Then he may

changes lenses and start all over again.

It really is true that if you take a lot of images you will get a lot of photos that you like. The more expressions and smiles you can capture of the people around you, the more you will enjoy the photos that you take. Give all the tips and suggestions included here at try. Some will probably work better than others for you depending on what kind of photos you happen to like.

If nothing else, remember:

Tip #1 – Move in Close and Tip #12 – Have Fun.





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