

1



Connect with your child first and the expressions you love will follow.

f/2.8, 1/400, iso 400

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Get Ready Get Set

*“I truly believe that what I do is not about pictures on paper.
It’s about making a connection. The portrait is a side effect.”*

This poignant statement by modern-day family photographer Cheryl Jacobs can (and should!) be applied to all photographer-subject relations. But the connection between a parent photographer and child subject can be both powerful and delicate beyond words.



The Star

On the surface, it seems that taking photos of your kids should be a snap. After all, parents have everyday access to their kids and can capture moments as they arise. And parents are in the know regarding their child's interests, expressions and moods. Plus, kids are more comfortable with their parents than with anyone else.

But this familiarity is a double-edged sword. Just as you have the inside scoop on your children, they have the inside track on you! And more often than not, the snap of your shutter is their cue to push your buttons.

From the enthusiast photographer to the pro, shooting pictures of one's own children can leave any of us literally wanting to shoot something! And although clients tell me that I have the patience of a saint with their kids; trust me ... I've made a million mistakes with my own and lost my patience more times than I would ever actually admit. Thankfully, I've also learned some great tips along the way.



There is no question that kids know the (not so) fine art of how to push mom's buttons during a photo shoot.

f/2.5, 1/200, iso 400

©Rebecca Mudrick,
www.darling-art.com



Fun is the key ingredient to a successful shoot.

f/2.8, 1/500, iso 800

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Be Fun!

A common mistake of the mamarazzi is to get the *shot* but miss out on the *experience*. When this happens, the onslaught of kid groans and grimaces should come as no surprise; your little subject has been conditioned to think that camera time is akin to torture. Well, luckily, the damage is not permanent.

By definition, *paparazzi* are relentless in getting the shot. But mamarazzi can dare to be different. Start by trying the following experiment: Approach your next photo op with your child by aiming to create a fun memory instead of getting a great shot. Easier said than done, it's true; but this will help convince your tot that it can be fun for them when your camera comes out of the bag.



Be Honest.

While I encourage parents to use fun questions or games to evoke photogenic expressions, I'm not a fan of trickery. For instance, telling your toddler that "Elmo is hiding in the camera" might lead to a bewildered expression and a super snapshot. But what happens when he realizes that mom was not truthful?

Instead, use your child's imagination to draw out the same emotion. "Do you think that Elmo could fit inside my camera?" is a more honest question that will likely receive the same response and will spare you the song of *Liar, liar pants on fire*.

Honest conversation brings forth childhood wonder.

f/2.8, 1/200, iso 1000

©Stacy Wasmuth

Know when your star has had enough and be willing close the curtains on your show.

f/5.0, 1/200, iso 400

©Stacy Wasmuth

Be Kind.

Kids of all ages love to thumb through the family photo albums. How do you want them to feel when they re-live memories of the day that the shutter snapped? Chastised or cherished? Tormented or treasured?

Photographs are taken in a fraction of a second, but feelings from the captured moments last a lot longer. Handle your tiny celebrity with care, and remember that a little star treatment will go a long way.

This is surely one of photography's most difficult lessons, but it's one that guarantees great rewards.



The Lights!

It's been said that photography is the language of light. And since light is so important, it's easy to assume that the best shots will be taken in environments with the most light. That's a common mistake, and couldn't be further from the truth. More light does not necessarily make for a better-quality photo. Instead, find locations with soft, even and indirect light.

My best tip for getting more natural photos is to shoot in a location that offers the light made by nature herself. Good outdoor locations for ideal light are the shady spots under a porch awning or next to a tall building. For indoor shots, north-facing windows make a lovely light source, since they receive indirect sunlight at almost any time of day.

Avoid placing your subject in areas with direct light, especially if it is strong; because this kind of light will create harsh highlights and strong shadows, which usually leads to details being lost in areas that become washed out (too light) and/ or muddy (too dark). The only exception to this rule is during the periods close to dawn or dusk, known as the *Golden Hour(s)*, when direct light appears soft and flattering. This light is commonly called “sweet light,” and it's a favorite for many mamarazzi.

This photo features the warm, soft “sweet light” glow.

f/2.0, 1/250, iso 200

©Lisa Roberts, www.lisaluckyphoto.com









Turning off your camera's on-board flash will help you see exactly where natural sunlight is falling in a room, making your photos more realistic and professional-looking.

f/2.8, 1/250, iso 400

©Stacy Wasmuth

Similarly, areas with uneven lighting (think sun-dappled tree shade) can be tricky to photograph. The setting may look serene to the naked eye; but mottled light, especially on a person's face, often adds too much contrast to make a pleasing photo.

An overcast day is also good for photography. Thank goodness, right? If it's going to ruin your plans to spend the day sun worshipping, at least it's a fantastic time to break out your camera. A cloudy sky works like a giant diffuser for the harsh light of the sun, making almost any angle awesome for photos. The light on an overcast day is soft, and colors stay true. Fog can be equally fab, giving a dreamy look to your captures. It usually doesn't stick around for long though, so be ready to grab your camera and go for a wonderful walk in the "clouds."

In nearly all cases, to get realistic and professional-looking photos, avoid blasting your subject with bursts of light. Yep, I'm saying "Turn off your camera's built-in flash." And, if indoors, switch off unflattering overhead lighting and distracting background lamps. This will enable you to see how a room's natural light falls ... and create the best stage for your star.

However, if you are taking photos in near darkness or under the bright noon-day sun, you'll want to consider a reconciliation with your camera's flash. In these situations, issues of visibility and harsh light may be a problem. Your flash can help illuminate a scene or to fill in those pesky raccoon-eye shadows.

Find more on indoor and outdoor lighting in Chapters 3 and 4.



A simple background draws attention straight to the star of your photo.
f/2.8, 1/200, iso 500
 ©Stacy Wasmuth

The Set

Location, location, location! It's the magical mantra of the real estate world, and it can easily be applied to photography as well. Second only to your subject, the setting in which you take a photo is a captivating component. Here's some advice.

Clear the Clutter.

Clutter can be one of the most distracting elements in a photo. In a perfectly photogenic world, all of your photo ops would have a clean background that beautifully features your subject in a crisp and interesting way. But since real life is rarely clutter-free, there are a few things you can do to keep the focus on the star instead of everything else.

- ✦ Select a simple setting for your photos. A solid sofa, colorful comforter or even a blank wall can make a picture-perfect setting. Outdoor options could be a field of flowers, simple staircase or a neutral fence.
- ✦ Crop the clutter by filling the frame. Sometimes all it takes to clear clutter from your photo is to move closer to your subject. Voilà! The distractions disappear. Don't be worried if you chop off the top of your child's head. Chances are, it will lead to a clever close up ... and you'll never miss seeing that part anyway!
- ✦ Run a background check. Is there a lamp sprouting from Junior's head? What about that parked car marring the picturesque view? Most of the time, changing your position ever so slightly can put the distracting elements back in

their place. So adjust your angle to eliminate distracting clutter from your photo. Shooting from high above allows you to include only the immediate foreground in your photo.

- ✧ Blur the background by using a wide aperture. The smaller the aperture value, the less the background will be in focus. (See Chapter 6: Camera Crew for more info on choosing aperture values.) Similarly, separating your subject from the background and/or moving closer to your subject will further enhance the beautiful background blur.
- ✧ Claim the clutter by using it to enhance your photo. Sometimes clutter is just a part of life with kids; and, as the saying goes, if you can't beat it, join it!

Sometimes clutter can be used in a creative way.

f/2.5, 1/100, iso 800

© Clarice Hendel
www.studiocee.com



Play it Safe.

When choosing a set for your super star, there are locations you should always use, a few that you can sometimes use, and some that you should just plain avoid.

Always!

Kids typically respond best when they're familiar with their surroundings. In this regard, there's no place like home for great photos. Have your child make his bed (gasp!) for a comfy photo op. Use your front porch steps for a simple backdrop. Or capture your daughter's bed head in the breakfast nook. Your children will be most natural when they feel right at home.

You can't go wrong when you take photos in your local garden or park. A nature conservatory will be well-manicured with beautiful landscaping. And bonus: You don't have to do the weeding! A playground or park provides a safe and clean location that your child is sure to enjoy.

A local park is sure to have plenty of natural backdrops for your photos.

f/2.8, 1/320, iso 200

©Stacy Wasmuth



Your child's bed may be your best bet for a natural setting.

f/2.8, 1/320, iso 800

©Stacy Wasmuth



Sometimes

If your über cool child adores his True Religion jeans and spray painted skateboard, you may consider an urban setting for a shot. But think carefully before you dash downtown. Some of the most hip urban spots may still have garbage, broken glass and even not-so-photogenic panhandlers as well as distractions—from passersby to noisy traffic. Choose a safe, clean spot that is well away from the hustle and bustle yet public enough to keep you feeling secure while shooting.

Wild fields are perfectly photogenic in print, but they can be riddled with obstacles like thorns, bugs, or (eek!) snakes. Rather than going knee deep in brush, a better alternative is to photograph your child right at the edge of a field. This way your child can stay comfy while you still benefit from a great background for your shots.

Or, turn your own backyard into the “wild” by skipping a few mowing sessions. You’ll enjoy the (well-reasoned) break from yard work, and you’ll get some luscious long grass to enhance your photos.

By skipping a mowing session (or two!) you can create a wonderful look for a photo.

f/2.0, 1/2000, iso 200

©Stacy Wasmuth





Never

Railroad tracks are frequent features in family photos, and this may seem like the perfect setting for a photo of your train-obsessed tot. But what many people don't know is that walking on railway property is trespassing at best, and (in some states) a felony. Even scarier is the safety concern for being around tracks that are still in use. My advice is to run from the railway idea. Run far, far away from that. Better safe than sorry!

And sure, we've all seen adorable photos of newborns in funny places: sleeping atop a stack of towels, balancing in a basket, or even lounging in a suspended sling. But it may surprise the average mamarazzo that many of these are simply optical illusions provided by Photoshop. So unless you have several helping hands as well as excellent editing skills, do not try this at home, folks. No matter how cute a photo idea can be, it is simply not worth the danger it might pose to your child!

Your baby's crib provides a safe and familiar environment for photo ops.

f/2.8, 1/160, iso 1600

©Stacy Wasmuth



Visit the same location during different seasons for a cool (and warm!) photo pairing.

f/5.6, 1/400, iso 400 (winter)

f/3.5, 1/500, iso 400 (summer)

©Amy Smith,

www.amysmithphoto.com



The Show

Now that your star is prepped, the lights are ready and your stage is set... let the show begin!

There are two primary tried-and-true ways to get great photos of your little star: play paparazzi or arrange an appearance. Each method requires a slightly different approach, but both will fill your albums with fabulously fun photos.



The first method is to literally follow your diva paparazzi style, snapping shots as you go. Simply aim your camera, watch for the subject to move into the perfect setting, wait for the magical moment, and (cue Emeril's booming voice) ... BAM! You've got a great shot.

At times the wait can be exhausting, but some of the most natural photos happen when kids are unaware of the camera's presence. And while standard star-stalking techniques—Why is mom hiding in the bushes??—are more likely to blow your cover than seal the shot, there are a few things you can do to lower your profile.

Sneak a shot while your child is playing to get a great candid capture.

f/2.8, 1/400, iso 800

©Stacy Wasmuth

- ✿ Zoom in to capture moments from an unobtrusive distance. Your delighted daughter may not even notice your presence on the deck as you snap away while she blissfully blows bubbles in the yard.
- ✿ Shoot sans eye contact. Parents rarely take profile photos, but a chubby cheek or wide-eyed wonder will look completely different when captured from the side. Give it a try.
- ✿ Photograph your child as he walks away. Sometimes a parting photo can tell a story even better than a perfect pose.
- ✿ Don't be afraid to snap expressions that don't include a smile. From your toddler's temper tantrum to your tween's puckered pout, you'll embrace all of these emotions when looking back one day.

See Best Bling in Chapter 5: Shopping Spree for info on the spy lens—a perfect accessory for grabbing secret shots of your star!

Although a candid capture is as natural as it gets, shooting secretly also requires a plethora of patience. So, if you're a bit short on that, try the second mamarazzi method and completely can the candid. Get great photos by grabbing the bull by the horns... er, the camera by its straps ... and set up the scene for some super shots.

- ✿ Use creativity to coax your subjects' smiles. Try a fanciful tea table, a popcorn and pajama party, or a lineup of most-loved toys to entice your child's participation.

Fun is the key ingredient to a successful shoot.
f/2.8, 1/500, iso 800
 ©Stacy Wasmuth





- ✿ Match the mood you are trying to capture by using similar body language, tone and setting. Slow speech, gentle movements and dramatic lighting can affect your subject's stance in a completely different way than silly jokes, jumping jacks and a bright background.
- ✿ Cut the fake cheese in your captures and get genuine smiles by engaging your daughter in peek-a-boo. Or encourage your son to tell his obnoxious knock-knock joke yet one more time. It's guaranteed to get at least one of you laughing!

Dramatic lighting leads to a thoughtful capture in this image.
f/2.8, 1/250, iso 800
©Stacy Wasmuth

Find more tips and tricks for natural expressions in chapter Ch 10: No Cheese Please.

Whether candid or created, the best tip of all is to keep your kids nearby and your camera within reach. Whether it's a phone in your pocket, a dSLR on the shelf or a compact camera in your purse, a true mamarazzo like you always has a camera poised for action. Because, let's face it, only if your camera is as everyday as sippy cups and soccer practice, can you be sure to capture each memorable moment as it happens.



Keep your camera ready so that you can take advantage of everyday fun.

f/2.8, 1/500, iso 800

©Stacy Wasmuth

Inside Scoop from Photography Superstars

Capture the Real McCoy

Photo Advice from Rebecca Worple, www.owenemma.com

Photographing your own children is probably one of the toughest things for you to do. Why? Because as you likely know, your kids behave so much better for other people than they do for you! That's why, at your parent-teacher conferences, you sit there wondering if your child's teacher accidentally grabbed the wrong folder or is mistaking you for another child's parent.

Thankfully, though, the world thinks your kids are perfect. There's some joy in that. But behind the scenes, you live with the "real McCoy" versions, which makes photographing them so tough ... for you. The minute you raise your camera, they make bunny ears, stick out their tongues, hide or simply turn around. They will do anything to make it impossible for you. That's their job, right? And you eventually give up. Mission accomplished.

This is precisely why many families turn to professional photographers. But is this inevitable? No. So how do you, a mom, capture great photos of your kids?

Well, it starts before you even pick up the camera. Try this simple exercise.

On a piece of paper, jot down every word that comes to mind when you think of your kids. Nothing formal here—just brainstorm. You might find that you write down things like:

- ✦ *wisp of hair on nape of neck*
- ✦ *sparkling eyes*
- ✦ *fingers crossed*
- ✦ *tippy toed walks*
- ✦ *stuffed dinosaur*

These are things you want to capture! This is your child now. So while you might focus on the face and the expressions, there are other little things that you don't want to forget.

Now, before you choose a setting for your photos, sit back and really think about your kids. What is it that they truly love to do?

- ✦ Digging in the dirt outside?
- ✦ Picking flowers?
- ✦ Washing the dog?
- ✦ Going to the park?

Focusing in on an activity that your child loves will increase your odds for achieving a successful photoshoot. If your kids love water (and almost all of them do!), get out the sprinkler. They may take the stream of water coming from the hose and turn it into a jump rope. Or they'll limbo underneath it. Or maybe they'll simply aim it directly at their sibling's face.



f/5.0, 1/500, iso 200

©Rebecca Worple, www.owenemma.com

No matter. You'll end up with beautiful and natural images of your kids. The key is to let them do what they want. Let them control the photo shoot. Your job is to facilitate the fun ... and capture it!

And once you've got some ideas to try, you'll want to gather the proper tools to capture the action. Kids love funny, silly things. For really little ones, you might want to have noisemakers on hand, such as keys, to get their attention. Or consider downloading the "fart app" for your iPhone.

Remember, kids are kids. And you're going to need to think and act like a kid to capture their true personality. This includes great jokes. Silly sounds. Funny songs. And you, frankly, looking like a nut.

Just remember that kids want to have fun. Like when you tried to get your child to eat broccoli for the first time, you have to make it fun for them. If it's fun, they'll stick with you ... for awhile at least. And you'll be rewarded with great photos!

