

Kiwi Guide to Family Photography

A young child with short dark hair and blue-rimmed glasses is the central focus. The child is wearing a dark blue polo shirt with a red collar and red and white stripes on the sleeves. They are resting their chin on their right hand and looking thoughtfully to the left. The background is a lush green field with yellow flowers, slightly out of focus.

Composition tips to go beyond 'click
and hope' family photos

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Anyone can take photographs, however, don't expect to take the perfect photograph every time you pick up your camera – doing so takes lots of practice.

So take your camera with you often, and make the most of everyday opportunities. It helps to know about your equipment, and how to make it work for you, so spend some time learning about the extra features your camera offers. Lots of organisations offer photography courses that will assist in this area.

Here's some initial ideas to consider:

- Modern cameras have the ability to take lots of images in a short time and the ones you don't like, you can delete without spending too much time or money.
- Just start somewhere – waiting around for everyone to say 'cheese' can spoil the moment and result in lots of fake looking expressions.
- It's getting easier to manipulate the photographs on a basic computer to ensure you get just what you want, so you don't necessarily need to see the perfect shot on the back of your camera, you can work with it later.
- Don't forget to regularly download those images so that you don't lose them or the format that they are saved in. It's also a good idea to get into the habit of getting images printed so that you don't just end up with thousands of images that no one ever sees.

Tip #1: Focus on the eyes

We are naturally drawn to each other's eyes. This is especially true when we look at little ones, who usually have great big, bright, wonderful eyes.

They're like little gateways to their sparkling personalities. For this reason if you can focus on their eyes, you'll no doubt end up with an image that *you* will love.

I especially love faces and often take a photo so close that I cut off the top and bottom of the face just to really get up close with those wonderful eyes.

I really find the sharper and clearer the subjects' eyes in a photo are, the better the overall 'feel' of the image is.



Tip #2: It's the little things

Take photos of everyday moments... eating dinner, getting dressed, playing games outside.

I like to take photos of their special toys too. Keepsake memories for those toys that just won't make it, but that you know they'll cherish one day. It really is all these little things that we treasure later on. When we look back at just how little their hands were, or remember that they loved playing with some particular toy all the time.



Remember to take photos of the cute little things like your kid's feet and hands too. The locks of hair that will maybe darken, be cut off, or dyed later on as they grow older. You don't always need to take photos of their entire body or even include their face.

Tip #3: The rule of thirds

This is a great tip and helps improve your images straight away. It's all about balance in your composition, and where subjects are placed in the overall image.

The basic idea is to break an image into thirds, both horizontally and vertically. The intersections of these imaginary lines are great spots for placing the subjects you're photographing, and should result in an image that feels harmonious to our eyes.

When you go to take a photograph, as you're looking through your viewfinder, imagine the image is cut into thirds. Now position the subject into either one third, two thirds or fill up the entire frame. If you can achieve a balance of thirds, both horizontally and vertically, in the same photo, the result should be quite appealing to the eyes.



Once you've got a good handle on this rule, you should try placing people and objects into different thirds in the same shot. This works really well for close up photography, where multiple subjects are included in the same shot that complement, rather than compete, with each other.

Like all composition rules, this is one meant to be broken. Try offsetting your subjects, rather than a strict third. Or, try half and half, or even splitting your shot into quarters. It's all about the style of image that you like, so have a play around and see what you prefer.

Tip #4: Camera ready... OK, go!

Keep your camera near by, all charged and ready to go. You just never know when a great photo opportunity may arise, especially with little ones.

Try taking your camera out with you when you do normal day-to-day things, like going shopping or running errands with your children.

Take LOADS of photos! With modern digital cameras it's easy to just delete the ones you don't like, so I recommend just snapping away as often as possible.

Memories fade, which is why photos are so great, they remind us of all the fun, family, laughter, and good times we love... so take loads of photos. One day you'll be so grateful that you captured all those precious memories of your children. Remember to get someone to grab a couple of you too!



And don't forget the relatives. Grans and gramps, the cousins, aunties and uncles. These are memories that last so much better on photos than in our minds. One great idea is to plan an outdoor picnic with friends and extended family, and take as many photos of different groupings of people on the day as you can. These photographs make great Chrissy presents at the end of the year!

Tip # 5: Lighting

This is one area that comes with practice (and I'm still working on it myself!). Basically soft light is the best. So try and find spots around the home when that lovely buttery afternoon sun streams in, and then get the kids playing there to capture a lovely light photo.

Morning is also a great time to take photos. And you'll find the angle of the sun in early Spring, and late Autumn, throws beautiful soft lighting for photos too.



The middle of a sunny day definitely isn't a good time to take photos! You'll find that your photos are washed out, the colours seem dull, and your subjects are probably squinting in the bright light.

I love soft, natural light and don't use any artificial lighting in my photography. Capturing that natural lighting really comes down to timing, and practice though. So just give it a go. A photo using natural light can have amazing results! Play around with the time of day you take your photos and see what you like. Try taking your kids down to your local park, or playground first thing in the morning, or an hour before the sun sets, and see what you get.

Tip #6: Location, location, location

Pay attention to the background of your photos. Simple backgrounds like a park or beach are great, where kids can have fun and play but there isn't anything too distracting behind them. You want your little darlings to be the star of the photo, not something random in the background that draws your attention away from them. If you're at home, pick a space that isn't too crowded, perhaps by a plain wall. And don't be afraid to move objects away, or move your subjects into a better location to get that great shot. Just try to do it very casually, so that your subjects will still act naturally in front of the camera.



Remember to look through the viewfinder and take it all in, before you start snapping. If you like it, go for it, if it feels cluttered, it will be!

Tip #7: Get high, get low

Taking photos from a standing position as an adult is like taking photos from above and will generally leave you with average images of your kids. Try getting down to the little people's level, or even lower.

I like to get right up into their faces, as they are just so adorable! That doesn't mean to say you can't take photos from up high. Trying standing up on the bed and then get them to look back up at you... it could be a great shot.



Get high, get low... and take lots of photos from all kinds of different angles. I learnt this first from my son. I let him use the camera and take photos around the house. I was so amazed at the different ways he looked at things, and some of his images were so cool because they were shot at angles I wouldn't attempt.

So, instead of the usual standing position, give the unusual a go. Try a few abstract shots... zoom in or focus on things from a different perspective. Let your child dominate a photo, literally fill up the image with their beauty from up high and then try down low, even lying on the ground! You'll soon get a feel for what works, and what you do and don't like. Just be careful with your camera if you find yourself climbing up trees!

Tip #8: Make it fun!

Really great photos tell a story. And you want your family stories to be full of fun and memories of great times together. Get your kids doing something they love, that gives them joy, that makes them laugh, and you'll surely get some wonderful photos. Be silly, and let them be silly. Have some fun together *before* you start snapping away. Take a few photos, and then continue playing around, then take a few more.

If they think you're being genuine then they can be too! Let their personality literally bubble out. I just love that sparkle in their eyes, it's the 'real' them.

One thing to try is once you have a relaxed and happy child, set the camera to rapid fire or burst mode, and get a lot of shots fast. Ask them to dance, or kick a ball, or blow some bubbles, and fire away. It could be a really cool series of photos that could be put together on a canvas.



And my last tip: PLEASE do not ask you kids to SMILE! What I find works much better is to say to them, “don’t smile ok? No seriously... don’t you smile silly sausage” repeat that a few times and see what smiles you get. They're usually great, filled with laughter, and twinkling eyes. I read somewhere that laughter is a smile that's grown so big it's burst... I love that!