



Module 14: **Children & Babies**

Module overview

In this module you'll learn about the following:

- Photographing Children
- Photographing Babies
- Parents and Children
- Using Props
- Serious Photographs
- Children and Baby Photography Tips



“If a photographer cares about the people before the lens and is compassionate, much is given. It is the photographer, not the camera, that is the instrument.”

Eve Arnold
(1912 – 2012)

Tip: if you're dealing with a child who does not like being photographed, get the parents involved in the shoot. Either make them part of the photographs or position them off camera and have them interacting with their child.

If you're using reflectors and both parents are present, ask one the parents to stand out of frame with the reflector while the other parent stands behind you but still visible to the child.

This parent can get the child's attention and make it look like the child is looking into the camera.

14.1 Photographing Children

There's no such thing as "the ideal way to photograph children", but it's important to remember that you have to be flexible (in terms of your approach) and work around them. This is especially true with younger children.

Children who don't like being photographed

Just like adults, some kids love being photographed and some kids hate it. The kids who love being photographed are obviously easier to shoot. For kids who are uncomfortable in front of the camera, you have employ some tricks and misdirection to make them forget they're being photographed. Sometimes this will mean taking candid shots. If you try and make a child pose for a photograph and they don't want to do it, then the child will look awkward and the image will suffer.



An example of the misdirection approach, although having the adult hand in the frame is not always ideal. In this case, the hand and the grasshopper become part of the composition.

Having something to draw the child's attention away from the camera can be a good way of getting natural-looking photographs. Use whatever you can to distract your subject from the fact that they're being photographed.

Tip: try to avoid using flash, especially with babies and very small children; it can startle and, in some cases, frighten them.

If you absolutely must use flash, then use the bounce technique; but you might still get a bad reaction from the child.

This image is clearly posed and not candid. However, it shows what you can do when you have the subject's attention taken by something else: you can choose whether or not to make it part of your composition.



Have you noticed something these photos have in common?



The children are not smiling, but that's ok. If you want your photographs to have a more artistic feel, then you need to have your subject smiling. Some people might look at this photo and be underwhelmed by it; but what if you edited it?

Tip:

sometimes parents can be more difficult to deal with than children.

If you find the parents are trying to control the shoot (and their child), just have a quiet word with them and explain that they can relax and that the photos will be better if their child is also more relaxed.

No smile is better than a forced smile.



It may seem like a cheat, but there's nothing wrong with editing. If you're viewing photography as an art form, then editing is a part of that and requires just as much skill as taking the photograph in the first place.



Tip: if you're shooting a child that can't be still, then go into sport mode. Let them do what they want and just keep shooting.

It will mean more photos to go through later, but your chances of getting something good will be much higher.

Another thing that can make kids more relaxed is having a fun activity to do. Find out what their favourite thing is and try and incorporate it into the photo shoot. It doesn't have to be in the frame, but if it's something that can get their attention and get a positive reaction, then use it.

Children who like being photographed

This section will be shorter because kids who like being photographed are much easier to shoot and you don't need to employ strategies or use tricks to get their attention.



Just let them be themselves and if you do your part right, their personality will come out in the images.

In terms of settings, the only thing to be concerned about is shutter speed: some kids move fast, so your shutter speed will need to match that.



Tip:
remember
that your
subject
doesn't have
to be looking
into the
camera all
the time.

Eye contact
is good but
not
essential.



Asking them to be silly and pull faces also helps; if you make it fun, you will get better photos.

14.2 Photographing Babies

Photographing babies presents a whole new set of challenges; while they're less mobile than older children, they can also cry at the drop of a hat, so you'll need to be patient.

Tip: you might have to boost your ISO setting to give you faster shutter speeds, but you can also experiment.

If your subject is hyperactive, having some motion blur can be a good reflection of their personality.

Just make sure every shot isn't like that.



When they're sleeping, it's easy, and you'll have a little more time to compose your shot (just don't use the flash).



When they're awake, use their favourite toy to get their attention. Continuous shooting mode will also help; keep shooting to make sure you don't miss a great facial expression, like a smile or look of surprise.

Keep your aperture around f/8 and increase the ISO to make sure you have a fast shutter speed, because babies can't be told to keep still and you don't want motion-blurred shots.

Tip: get down to your subject's eye level.

Either kneel down or, if you have an articulating LCD screen angle, hold your camera low but angle the screen up so you can frame your images.



People often forget that newborn babies have wrinkles. So it's ok to do some minor retouching with editing software. Make sure the parents are okay with this first.



When retouching a photograph, there's often a temptation to do too much and then the final image has a fake, plastic look to it; and some photos do have a "retouched" look to them.

Don't try to remove the lines and wrinkles completely; the idea is to soften them and give the image a more natural look. Using the blur tool in your photo editor should do the job; set the brush to a small size and the strength to 50% and gradually soften those lines.

Tip: using sport mode can also help with your focusing.

In this mode, the auto focus will track the subject; it's not always 100% reliable, but it helps when you're following a child that's moving around a lot.

14.3 Parents and Children

Bringing in one or both of the parents can yield some great results. The interactions between parents and their children will give you lots of opportunities to capture a magic moment.



It helps to keep the background light and as simple as possible; and if you have to shoot indoors, keep the light soft – so if you're using a flash, bounce it off the ceiling. A reflector can also help. If you're using off-camera flash, position the reflector to bounce some of the light into any areas where you see deep shadows.



Try and keep the mood light and fun – encourage your subjects to be silly.

Tip: talk to children that are old enough to speak. Don't tell them what to do – just try and build a rapport with them.

Ask them questions, tell jokes and play around with them. Try doing this while you're shooting.

If they appear uninterested, try showing them the photos that you're taking on the LCD screen.

14.4 Using Props

As with any form of portrait photography, using props can help to create some fun images. This is especially true when photographing children.



Giving them something to focus their attention on can help you to get more natural-looking shots.

Tip: the first time you shoot with kids you might not get any great shots – but don't get disheartened; kids are unpredictable and you have to think fast.

If you don't have a great shoot, just try again.

Something colourful will always get their attention, but try to avoid shiny objects as they may cause lens flares or unwanted reflections.



14.5 Serious Photographs

As previously mentioned, children don't always have to be smiling in photographs; so if you want to try something different, you can always take a more artistic approach. Try shooting in a more candid, documentary style with the emphasis on mood and character. High contrast black and white can work very well with this style.

Tip: if you have a wide angle lens, you'll have to get really close to your subject. This is fine for babies, but when photographing older children a telephoto lens is better. Give them some freedom to move around and if you need to get closer, just use your zoom.



Unlike the other styles, this is one where strong lighting is preferred; and when you convert to black and white, don't afraid to boost the contrast.



14.6 Summary

- If you can't keep children occupied and engaged with the camera, keep them distracted so they don't realise they're being photographed.
- Try and make the shots as natural as you can, unless you're trying something more artistic.
- Keep your aperture on a medium setting and your shutter speed fast (boost the ISO if necessary).
- Toys and props can be a big help.
- Make the most of the parents: if you think they can improve the photo, then put them in it.
- Try to avoid flash, especially with very small children.
- Make it fun.

Assessment 14

- 1) Why would you use a high ISO setting when photographing children?
- 2) True or False? You should always use flash when photographing children.
- 3) Explain the reason for your answer to Question 2.
- 4) What is the purpose of using props?
- 5) What type of aperture setting would you recommend?
- 6) True or False? The child should always be looking at the camera.
- 7) Is it ok to edit the photos?
- 8) True or False? You should never use black and white.
- 9) Why would you include one or both parents in the photographs?
- 10) Should all photos of children be fun?

14.8 Assignment

If you don't have children of your own, then ask a friend or relative who does and obtain their permission to photograph their child or children (it might be best simply to start with one, but it's up to you).

Photograph the child in an environment they are used to – either home or maybe a local park. Make sure that at least one of the parents is with you, as you may need some assistance.

Set your camera to sport mode and continuous shooting at first, and let them do what they want (within reason, of course). If you notice their energy levels starting to flag, switch to manual mode and try to be more deliberate about what you shoot.