



The Adorama Guide To Family Photography

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THE PHOTOGRAPHY PEOPLE

Introduction

Everyone wants to get great pictures of their relatives as memories and keepsakes. In this eBook you will find tips, hints, and ideas that anyone, from a simple snapshooter to sophisticated professional photographer, can benefit from. For more tips and picture-taking ideas, including articles, podcasts and videos, be sure to visit the [Adorama Learning Center](#), the educational wing of [Adorama Camera, Inc.](#)

My thanks to our contributing authors, Sabra Krock, Jack Howard, Jon Sienkiewicz, and of course, Bowser Z. Dawg, for their informative, useful chapters! Read on, and enjoy photographing your family!

—Mason Resnick

Editor, Adorama Learning Center

Chapter 1: How to Photograph A Newborn Baby

Expecting a baby? With the right preparation, you can take home not just a bundle of joy, but a bundle of joyous photos of your newborn.

A newborn baby has a unique look that changes dramatically within hours of birth; if you want to capture this special moment, you need to bring a camera with you to the hospital (assuming you aren't into home births). Hospitals pose a unique set of problems for photographers, but with a bit of preparation, you can overcome these minor obstacles.

1.1 Hospital etiquette

Generally, hospitals don't allow cameras, but maternity wards are usually lenient about this, especially if you promise not to use your flash, and your camera doesn't look too scary (read: professional). DSLRs may cause a problem. It always pays to politely and respectfully ask the staff in advance if possible. Shooting without permission is certain to get you kicked out of the maternity ward, guys. If you are lucky enough to be in the birthing room at the moment of truth (I'm addressing the dads, now, obviously!), definitely ask the staff if it's OK to shoot and if they say no, don't.

Be prepared to shoot at a higher ISO...400 should do it. Turn shake reduction on. Since most hospitals are flooded with fluorescent lights, be sure to adjust your white balance accordingly as auto white balance might not do a thorough enough color balancing act and you'll end up with oddly-tinted images.



If you're allowed to photograph your child's birth, be respectful of the staff's needs. Ask where you should stand so you're not in their way. They'll appreciate your asking. Remember, your baby and wife come first, but any pictures you get will be valuable treasures. And while you might get caught up in the moment, edit your shots carefully:

the dramatic images you capture might be too graphic for some viewers, so choose images with sensitivity towards who will be looking at them. Some people may simply not be able to handle looking the blood and other fluids that cover a child at birth. Photo © Ijoe/iStockphoto.com

1.2 Shooting tips

Get close: Shoot tight close-ups of the baby. Don't zoom in—move as close as possible with your lens at its widest wide-angle setting. Zooming reduces your effective aperture and increases the chance of shaky shots, and since you're shooting with the flash off, you need every shake-reducing advantage you can find.

Get Mommy into the shot: After the excitement and drama of birth, Mommy and Baby will be exhausted. Get them sharing a nap, face to face.



Mother and child reunion: When baby is done eating, he will nap, but might yawn just before closing his eyes. Be alert as nursing time ends, and be prepared to capture the moment. Photo © rest/iStockphoto.com

Not a whole range of expressions: Babies do three things very well and often: Sleep, cry, and eat. All three can happen within minutes of each other, so be prepared. When eating, baby may be alert so you have a chance of capturing those newborn eyes. Get in really close!

Show the scale: Have Mommy hold baby in her hands (or give her the camera and have her photograph you holding baby). Get a shot of baby's head cradled in a parent's hands and you'll see exactly how tiny she is. Years from now, you'll show her this picture and tell her how she was *this small!*



Get a grip: Even a just-born infant will grip an adult finger. This is another great way to show a newborn's diminutive size. Get right up close and shoot away! (Also consider photographing a baby's feet, as they are amazingly tiny. Photo © oversnap/iStockphoto.com

—Mason Resnick

1.3 What About “Baby Mode”?

Some compact digital cameras have a scene mode setting specifically for use when photographing babies. This mode optimizes focus, exposure, color balance and saturation, shutter speed and aperture to get the best image quality when photographing a newborn or recently-born baby. Here’s how to get the most out of that mode.



1.3.1 Turn the flash off

First off, one should never use direct flash, especially from a portrait distance, because the flash creates harsh shadows, and may upset baby. Second, little ones seldom sit still long enough for you to compose a careful shot—unless they’re asleep. Finally, while all babies are beautiful, babies all look better when photographed straight on, or with their head at only a slight angle, instead of full profile.



1.3.2 Composition's important

Great baby pictures begin with good composition. In particular, watch the head angle. Next, use the Baby Mode if your camera has one. The Baby Mode will cancel the flash and boost the ISO so you'll get good exposure, even if the youngster moves a bit. If you do not have a Baby Mode, be absolutely certain that the flash is turned off. Shoot several frames. Most babies cycle through an array of subtly changing facial expressions that are sometimes hard to notice, but become obvious when caught by a camera.

If you ever have the wonderful opportunity to photograph a newborn—one that is just minutes old—you may be surprised to learn that human babies are born with their eyes open. Be quiet, move slowly and enjoy a rare experience.

—Jon Sienkiewicz

Chapter 2: Baby's First Year

Babies are amazing!

In one year, they transform from a helpless creature whose every need must be attended to into a being who laughs and interacts and almost is on the verge of taking their first steps, indicate favorite foods or toys. As motor skills are refined, the little tyke can grab and manipulate objects, her vision and ability to recognize familiar objects and people improves. She is learning about the world around her and soaking it all in like a sponge.

For the rest of this little person's life, this rapid pace of development will never again be so fast. The changes go by like *that* (visualize the author snapping his fingers). That's why it's so important to take lots of pictures of baby in that first year. Once he moves from just lying there to crawling to sitting up to cruising to walking, there's no going back.

Whether you're a working pro looking to improve your skills (and marketability) or are simply a new parent who wants to capture this fleeting period in your child's life, there are plenty of tricks and tips you can use to improve the quality of your pictures.

2.1 Don't try to be Anne Geddes

Australian photographer Anne Geddes has made a career out of photographing children in the oddest ways, like sleeping on a watermelon or as peas in a pod. These photos are major productions, often requiring hours of preparation, Photoshop wizardry, infinite patience, and saintly parents. Fortunately, you don't have to go to such extremes to get fantastic baby photos.

The secret to great infant photography is simply to capture the baby doing what's developmentally appropriate at that time. Don't force a 6-month-old to walk, and don't make a 1-year-old crawl. Let 'em do what comes naturally, and photograph the joy in their faces as they accomplish a recently-learned skill, or play with a favorite toy.

2.2 Get down to their level

Don't just stand there, sit down. Lie on the floor. Get to the child's level. She'll feel less threatened if you're eye-to-eye with her, and may be more playful and responsive. At baby's level, you can also better see those beautiful eyes. Baby making eye contact with the camera is essential.

If you don't wish to lie on your belly, you can still shoot waist-level. The Olympus Evolt 330 (<http://www.adorama.com/IOME330K3.html>) is a DSLR with a right-angle live LCD monitor that can be turned facing upwards so you can hold your camera low down and shoot. Several compact models also have rotating LCD monitors. But if your DSLR

lacks this feature, the [Pro Optic Right Angle Finder II](#) fits over the optical viewfinder of most DSLRs and using a periscope-type optic lets you look down to see the image.

2.3 Show off those baby blues!

One trick I sometimes employ to get a baby to look at the camera is to take a clean feather duster (make sure it's never been used for dusting!) and tickle baby's face. Then quickly move the feather duster out of the picture, towards the camera. Be prepared to snap quickly, as the baby's reaction (usually a crinkled nose, and a giggle, which is very cute) will be fleeting. Play peek-a-boo from behind the camera. Babies love that.

Another way to get eye contact is to make sounds. Not loud intimidating sounds (that could start a crying) but quiet cooing sounds. Imitating cats or birds, etc., will also get baby's attention. (Make sure you're shooting in a quiet environment.)

If you're not the parent but Mom and/or Dad are in the room, instruct them to let you make the sounds, even though they will be sorely tempted to encourage baby to pose. Their sincere attempts will actually distract baby, who will look in their direction instead of yours! If they want to help, have them stand behind you (maybe play peek-a-boo over your shoulder) and get baby's attention.

2.4 What should baby wear?

Dress him simply; a plain white "onesie" is fine. No patterns or bright colors—they only distract from Baby. The fewer clothes the better (assuming you're shooting somewhere warm). First, kids look cute in their birthday suits, but second (and more practically), babies tend to spit up on their clothes. Skin wipes off more easily than fabric. If you (or the parents) don't feel comfortable stripping baby for his photo, have several changes on hand, and watch out for wrinkled clothes!

2.5 Lighting tips

Avoid on-camera flash at all costs! They cast harsh, unflattering light that shouts out "amateur". Off-camera flash, preferably with a softener like a reflector or soft box, is better. Studio lights are ideal, but if you don't have any of the above, simply take pictures in a room with lots of window light or outdoors.

2.6 Four favorite poses

Here are four of my favorite poses:

1. **The Come Hither look:** This is great for babies as young as a month old! Get a bolt of shiny fabric from a fabric shop and lay it out on the floor, folded here and there. Lie baby face up on the fabric, and fold some fabric over so baby's partially covered. Shoot straight down. She'll look gorgeous.

2. **The Burrito:** When baby is old enough to lift his head while lying on his stomach, he's ready for this pose. Put baby on a clean white blanket on the floor. Drape another blanket or a towel over his head. Then, wait for him to lift his head off the floor and smile (see sample, below).
3. **The TV Pose:** A variation of the Burrito, but without the second blanket. Baby lies on stomach facing camera, rests chin on both hands. (This also works with older kids who can take directions)
4. **Cruisin':** When baby is old enough to almost walk, she may "cruise" or walk while holding onto a couch or chair. Have a low piece of furniture or a post ready, and get a shot of the pre-toddler holding on. Bonus points if you capture that look of pride at this new accomplishment!



It's never too early to photograph babies! I took this photo of my daughter, a variation of the "come hither" pose, when she was 2 weeks old, along with her collection of toy animals. I spread a bedsheet out on the living room floor, set up the shot (lit by daylight coming through a large picture window), then stood over her and shot down. She's a teenager now, and has a framed copy of this photo hanging in her bedroom. Photo © Mason Resnick



At 3-6 months, babies can raise their heads while lying on their tummies. Cover the tops of their heads and coax them to look up. Note the eye contact with the camera! This classic baby pose is known as "The Burrito." Photo © René Jansa/iStockphoto



By around 8 months old, most children are sitting up, crawling around and doing stuff. This one can pick up big objects—and the photographer captured her pride of accomplishment. Photo © Heiko Bennewitz/iStockphoto



Step one: Although it's very unlikely you'll have a camera around when baby takes that first step, as soon as he starts walking getting those tentative first steps will be a valuable memory. Photo © Elena Korenbaum/iStockphoto



Don't forget to include mom! Make sure both are well rested and you'll capture nothing but joy and emotion. (But use a soft-focus filter, just in case mom's showing signs of sleep deprivation.) The close eye contact between mother and child makes this a winner. Photo © Amanda Rohde/iStockphoto

—Mason Resnick

Chapter 3: 10 Tips for Taking Better Photographs of Your Young Child

Written and photographed by Sabra Krock

Visit Sabra's web site, <http://www.sabrakrockkids.com>

Whether you use a compact camera or pro rig, if you follow these easy tips you can consistently get amazing “keeper” shots of your infant, toddler, or young child.

3.1 Tip #1: Turn Your Flash Off and Use Natural Light

Let's begin with the most essential ingredient of every photograph: light. Do some of your photographs make your family look like a herd of deer caught in the headlights? Camera flashes can cause red-eye and produce artificial, unflattering, often harsh-looking, light.

Unless you use an off-camera flash set-up, turn your flash off and make use of natural light. While it is sometimes a necessity for me to use artificial light in my client work, I almost never use it when I photograph for personal use. Even when I do, I never ever use the built-in flash on my camera. Instead, I use professional studio lights and modifiers that produce a much more pleasing effect than the harsh light cast by the camera's built-in flash.

When you begin experimenting with natural light, you will appreciate how much it flatters your subjects. Your subjects will appreciate this too! You'll start to capture beautiful, organic-looking scenes and portraits. What's more, turning off your flash will make your camera less conspicuous in public and open up more opportunities for candid situations.

Look for indirect natural light—the shade of a tree or an awning, or diffused by your window. When light shines beside your child, you will notice interesting soft shadows adding dimensionality to your composition. Facing your child straight on, light from the front creates a very soft, shadow-less portrait. Behind your child, backlight enhances colors and creates a bright backdrop.

The three photographs, below, of my almost 8-month-old son, Max, illustrate the three different effects you can expect with diffused window light from the side, front, and back.



Notice the dimensionality in this image, where light is coming from a window at left.



In this shot, soft, shadowless light is coming from the window straight on.



The color really pops here, thanks to the strong backlight and plain white background.

3.2 Tip #2: Get to Know Your Camera

Point-and-shoot cameras can be a slippery slope. They make picture-taking a fully automated process, but the automatic settings don't always allow you to make the most out of a shoot. Getting to know a few things about your camera will enable you to get more creative with your shots. Here are some tips for things to research in your camera manual.

- 1. Learn how to turn the flash off your camera.* I've said it already and I'll say it again. Natural, available light is far superior to flashbulb light, so make use of it as often as you can.
- 2. Learn whether your camera will allow you to manually change its aperture setting.* The wider the aperture, which is the size of the opening in the lens, the shallower the depth of field will be in your image. You have probably noticed and admired professional photos that have a softly blurred background and focus only on the primary subject. You can achieve this technique too by experimenting with your aperture setting.
- 3. Learn how to change the shutter speed of your camera.* A fast shutter speed (1/250th of a second) will freeze even the fastest-moving child, while a slow shutter speed may create some pleasing motion blur that gives you visual clues about how the subject moving. Play around and see what happens!
- 4. Learn how to adjust the ISO of your camera (the sensitivity of your camera to light).* You can often bump up the ISO of your camera to compensate for low-light conditions and avoid using a flash even in dim light.



I captured this image late in the day when the sun had faded. But because I bumped up the ISO of the camera and widened the aperture, I was able to get a well-exposed and tack-sharp image anyway. Notice how the depth of field is relatively shallow due to the aperture setting. This has a very pleasing effect of focusing attention on the sharp areas of the photograph.

My gear: I use a [Nikon D700 DSLR](#) , and the lenses that I use most often for child photography are prime (non-zoom lenses) the [Nikon 50mm f.1.4](#) and [Nikon 105mm f/2.8 Micro-Nikkor](#), which comes in handy when I want to get in close for details of feet, hands and so on. I look for natural light but sometimes augment it with studio strobes and [Westcott Apollo softboxes](#).

3.3 Tip #3: Get Candid

Posed photos may have their time and place, but candid shots that capture your child unselfconsciously at play are often the ones you'll treasure the most. I love taking pictures of my child looking directly into the camera, but I always look for opportunities to photograph him unaware. Either way, I almost never ask my subjects to say cheese.

Be patient and wait for genuine smiles. Instead, try talking and engaging with your subject from behind the lens or sitting down with your camera during playtime. After a while, babies and children – and even adults -- will forget the camera and return to whatever they're doing. You will capture some precious moments that encapsulate the spirit of your child and your family.



This is a photo of Max and his slightly older friend Bea playing in the afternoon. I love the sweet innocence of this scene.



This is a shot of my husband and Max looking out at the first snowfall of the winter. I had to race to get my camera before the moment was lost.



And here is Max reading with his great aunt. Sometimes the view from behind tells the story!

3.4 Tip #4: Don't Forget Yourself

In our house, I'm the family documentarian, which means that I am not often in the frame. While I enjoy (OK, I won't say prefer) being behind the camera, I know that I will regret not having some images with me in them.

I bought a point-and-shoot camera so my husband and other family members can confidently shoot pictures too. I've also mastered the art of self-timers and taking photos in mirrors. Obviously, getting a professional to take some family photos is an even better option, but you can't do that all the time.



However you shoot pictures, don't forget to make regular cameo appearances in your family album, experiment and have fun. I am the master of the self-timer. Above, Max and I are hanging out the in afternoon, only a couple months after he was born.

3.5 Tip #5: Don't Leave Home Without It

No amount of camera tips can make up for no camera at all. Remember to carry your camera with you as often as you can so you don't miss out on unexpected photo opportunities.

While it's quite bulky, I often lug my camera with me outside of my home because Murphy's Law assures me I'll miss something the one time I decide to leave it behind. If your usual camera seems too involved to take with you, swap it for more portable model you keep in your car or baby bag at all times. Just remember: even though many cell phones now have reasonably good cameras built in, they are usually too low resolution to generate a decent print, making them poor substitutes for a dedicated camera.



This was Max on his first swing ride. I'm glad I had my camera with me!



This is Max, me and his dad watching fireworks on the fourth of July, when Max was only a few weeks old. It was certainly inconvenient to carry my tripod up to the roof, but I love this little vignette and am so glad I have it. It was obviously completely dark out besides the fireworks when the above photo was taken. Nevertheless, I was able to use available light with a long shutter speed. It's not a perfect image, but for me it worked more beautifully with the painted sky as backlight than with a flash.

3.6 Tip #6: Hire a Pro

There is no substitute for professional photos. I know this sounds self-serving, but it's true. Think about it: that's why you hired a photographer for your wedding day. There's a big difference between a casual snapshot and a carefully composed and executed image. Beautiful photos are worth their weight in gold: they become family treasures for generations.

Some of the best times to hire a child photographer are along these junctures:

Newborn

This phase passes so quickly, and is often preoccupied with many adjustments and distractions that make it nearly impossible to capture this time well on your own. The ideal time to have your newborn photographed is within this first two weeks of life, when they are at their sleepiest and most cooperative and can be curled into beautiful poses. Your child will never be so small and pliable again. It's wonderful to have this time captured forever.

Six to Eight Months

The next great juncture for adorable professional photographs is when your child is sitting up. They no longer need to be propped up for the camera and are quite curious and alert.

One Year

This is the perfect time to capture new walkers. It can be a challenge, as toddlers are often looking down at their feet and scooting away from the camera. However, this phase of new discovery offers a great opportunity for serendipitous shots of your child in action.

Three to Four Years/With Sibling

This is one of my favorite ages. Your child is now full of personality and sometimes there's a new baby in the family, too. It's a great time to get both children photographed together.

'Tween/Older Children

Full of personality and independence, kids of this age are a lot of fun to work with. The opportunities for creativity are almost endless.

Luckily for me, I was able to take many of the types of shots of my son that I like to take for newborn clients. Still, I don't necessarily have all of the shots I would be able to get

in a dedicated newborn sitting because even as a photographer, it is hard to dedicate the time, attention and patience required to work with a newborn.



This is Max in a pose typical of my newborn work, held by his dad at two weeks old.



This is another of Max early on. I usually photograph newborns unclothed but this is one of my favorite outfits from [Estella](#), a Manhattan-based children's clothing store.

3.7 Tip # 7: Get in Close

Don't be afraid to scoot in as close as you can when photographing your child, especially down on the ground at eye-level. Many amateur shots are taken so far back that you lose the best details: your child's eye lashes, toes, the light in his or her eyes. Mix it up and come in close on some shots. You will love having an archive of all those little details later on.

Getting down on the ground to take photos will also change your perspective and help you see your child's world from their vantage. You will have a better chance of getting your child to look straight into the camera and the surroundings you capture will reflect their universe.



Here are a couple shots of Max, close up and on his level. I love making eye contact with my subjects. It's a cliché, I know, but the eyes are truly the windows to the soul.



I also vary my perspective and take wider-angle environmental shots where possible. But moms always love close-ups where they can really see the detail of their child's face!

3.8 Tip #8: Click, Click, Click

Over-shoot. Digital photography is free and unlimited. Pretend your child is a fashion model on a runway or magazine shoot set. Children are fast-moving and the tiniest details – whether their eyes are open or at half-mast, whether their face is well-lit or in the shadows, the position of a hand or foot – can make or break a shot. I find that it often takes 10 frames or more to get one great one. You'll be happy to have choices when it comes time to edit your photos.



This shot of Max looking right at me seems easy enough, but as you know, little ones rarely hold your gaze, particularly when there is a camera in your face! I had to take many shots to get just the right one.

3.9 Tip #9: Pay Attention to the Background

Have you ever shot something brilliantly only to notice later that there's an ugly Kleenex box or some other distracting element lurking in the background? I have done this more times than I can count and I always wish that I had noticed it in the moment. Luckily, if there is something small and pesky in a favorite photo, you can usually eliminate it or lessen its impact in the frame using Photoshop. An easier technique is to get in the habit of quickly taking stock of what's in your camera frame before starting a shoot. Push the dirty laundry and homely toys out of the way before you begin a session. Afterwards, you can push it all back.



This photo was taken of Max with a plain white wall behind that serves as a nice, neutral backdrop. At other times my home is the backdrop but I blur the busy background with my aperture setting to make distractions fade away.

3.10 Tip # 10: Experiment With Framing Your Shot

Our instinct is to frame our subject in the center of the lens and start shooting. There are all sorts of professional rules about composing a photo, but the basic idea is this: framing your subject in the dead center of the shot time after time is boring.

Instead, experiment with the composition of your shot. If your child is looking at something, include the thing he or she is looking at in the frame, even if it means your child is off-center. If your child is running, create space in the composition for your child to run into. Think about whether your shot is best composed horizontally or vertically.

If your camera has different focal points, learn how to adjust your focal point so that it moves out of the center position to the area filled by your subject. If you cannot do this, you may need to push your shutter half way down to lock the focus on your child before adjusting your composition and pushing all the way down to take the shot.



Here's Max, just a couple of weeks old, with his doggie sibling, Zulu. We were all taking advantage of a rare quiet moment to nap. The framing of the photo tells the story.

Editor's note: All images and text in Chapter 3 are © Sabra Krock Photography, and may not be duplicated or repurposed without the author's permission.

Chapter 4: First Food and Nap, Then Photos

A contented baby will smile, laugh and play. A hungry and/or tired baby will cry, squirm, and generally won't be very cooperative or photogenic. So I'll state the obvious: Photograph a fed, rested baby. Don't photograph a tired, hungry one.

This is easier said than done, unless you are photographing your own child and can control the schedule and environment. But if you're running a part- or full-time portrait studio (or aspire to one) and photo sessions are by appointment, getting the timing right can be challenging.



Now, that's one happy, rested, well-fed little tyke! Photo © Jaroslaw Wojcik/istockphoto.com.

So, prep the parents. They know Baby's nap and feeding schedule, and shouldn't schedule an appointment during the wrong time. Many parents will know this instinctively, but prompt them anyway.



This baby needs food and a nap, not a photo session!
Photo © Ekaterina Monakhova/istockphoto.com.

And when the proud parents bring happy baby to the studio (or you go to them), be prepared to shoot fast. Have your lights set up, your camera charged with film and/or fresh battery and memory card all in their places. After a couple of minutes of attentive play, baby will be ready to move on, even if you want to keep shoot.

After all, that little one has the attention span of...well, a baby.

—*Mason Resnick*

Chapter 5: How to photograph a birthday party

Here's how most people take pictures at birthday parties: Flash on, perhaps with red-eye reduction pre-flash, the birthday boy or girl blowing out the candles or cutting the cake, maybe a few posed shots afterwards with friends. The look is consistent, familiar, and wrong, because the straight on-camera flash produces a coal-mine effect. Unflattering light falls on the faces of the people in the pictures and the background is most likely going to be dark, even though the room is light.

Who really enjoys birthday party pix that look like that?

Surprisingly, just a few camera adjustments can fix the coal miner look, while a few simple posing directions can help you capture the spirit of the party.

5.1 Get the light right

Step one is to change how you light and expose your party shots. The goal is to lighten the overall scene so it looks more natural and less like a coal mine. Let's start with what you can do with point and shoots cameras and work our way up the camera and flash food chain.

First, increase your ISO to about 400 (any higher and you'll have unacceptable digital noise, even if you are only making a 4x6-inch print). Then, change your flash mode to night portrait mode. The camera will choose a longer exposure so the ambient light in the room will look brighter and more natural, while the flash will fill in the shadows. Be sure to hold your camera steady (turn on shake reduction).



If you are using a DSLR with the flip-up flash, use a light modifier, such as [Professor Kobre's Lightscoop](#) or the [Lumiquest ProMax Pocket Bouncer](#), to lift and broaden the light. Use this in conjunction with the point-and-shoot flash-modifying instructions.

If you are using a DSLR and have a flash with a swivel head, you don't have to boost your ISO or use night portrait: point the flash towards a wall or ceiling (assuming that wall or ceiling is white) and bounce it to create an open, ambient light. If you don't have a white wall or ceiling to bounce the light off of, consider creating the bare-bulb

look with a Gary Fong Lightsphere or [Flashpoint Q system Diffuser Dome](#) (shown).

Even better: If you have a wireless flash with more than one flash unit, set up a second flash on a stand to fill in the background while the on-camera flash is more direct. Both flashes should be diffused, of course.



Gather 'round, everybody! Note how the light is open and the background is well lit. Following the above directions will get you more natural-looking birthday photos. © snapphoto/istockphoto.com

5.2 Be a party director

Let's take the “blowing out the cake” shot. Most photographers worth their salt will strive to capture this one. Here's how it usually plays out: Everyone is sitting around a table, with the birthday boy or girl at the head. The cake is brought out accompanied by singing in varying keys. The candles are blown out, the picture is taken, and you're done. The resulting image, however, is the person blowing out the candles, looking either alone (being at the head of the table) or with one or two people looking on.

That's a mighty lonely-looking birthday celebration, isn't it? Let's fix it.

Before the cake comes out, you, as the photographer, are tasked with gathering guests around the birthday boy or girl. Have them stand behind and next to him or her, squished tightly together (which in itself can lead to some interesting expressions and moments). Now, have the cake brought out, and start shooting. Don't be shy about directing people to move so they're in the shot!

Photograph the approach, the singing, the blow-out, and the cake cutting, all with people still gathered around. This is your prime time!

5.3 Case Studies

Let's look at five successful birthday party pix, and what made them work:



Be sure you've locked focus and exposure on the birthday boy before he blows out the candle. That way you can avoid missing the moment due to lag time. © leggnnet/istockphoto.com



Once the ceremonial part of the party is over, go around the table, and take a quick portrait of each of the guests. You can zoom in or not as you wish. Shooting at a "normal" focal length will produce flattering portraits while still including others and the ambience of the party in the background. Photo © Monkeybusinessimages/istockphoto.com



Finally, there's the unwrapping of gifts...this is not only a fun photo opportunity (the expressions upon reading gag cards or seeing the gifts can be fun) but it's also a good way to document who gave what. Photograph the card with the gift. Easy. Photo © gchutka/istockphoto.com



Not just child's play: Birthday parties aren't just for kids, and don't necessarily have to be indoors. It's definitely OK to pose friends and family together with the smiling birthday girl. Just make sure the exposure is open and there aren't any bothersome shadows. Use a fill-in flash or a reflector to kick light into the happy faces. Photo © myrrha/istockphoto.com

Consider using an instant camera, such as a [Fujifilm Instax](#) or Polaroid (when it becomes available again later this year) or use a [portable snapshot printer](#), and give away images. In some situations, a way to recoup your costs is to offer guests the opportunity to order prints online. Upload your photos to [AdoramaPIX](#) and email the ordering information to

your guests (make sure to get everyone's email address).

Happy birthday!

—*Mason Resnick*

Chapter 6: How to Dress for a Family Photo

If you're going out for a family photo, doing it yourself, or are photographing other families, there's one visual element that will tie the photo together in a nice, neat bow: clothing. If people dress for a family photo casually with no direction, you will get a visual mishmash and will have a challenge keeping conflicting colors and designs from banging against each other.



Four on the floor: White tops keep this family together (visually, that is). Notice anything else they have in common? They're barefoot! Photo © Jaroslaw Wojcik/istockphoto.com. Note the [seamless white backdrop](#).

So, as in many things in life, there are three words of advice to follow: Keep it simple. All white is nice. All black can also work. A less formal but unifying look is jeans (and/or jean skirts) and white tops, be they T-shirts, blouses, or turtlenecks. In fact you can mix and match styles as long as the tops are a consistent color. You don't have to use white, but if not the family should pick a neutral color that everyone has. That's why white and black are easy colors.



Red-dy for a shoot: This family wanted to wear red--not exactly a neutral color but it worked for them. Note: Although the tops are different the color helps tie the image together visually. Expressions? Poses? You, the photographer, need to coax those out of your subjects! Photo © Juston Horrocks/istockphoto.com.

Make sure everyone's clothing is free of wrinkles, lint, pet hair, and dandruff (if someone's got a flaky scalp, black tops are out). Kids might get squirmy and scrunch their clothes, so keep an eye out for them, and if their shirts are getting bunched up, give the shirts a quick pull down to flatten them out just before shooting.

—Mason Resnick

Chapter 7: How to Master Dog Photography

By Bowser Z. Dawg

Editor's Note: Canis lupus familiaris--common dogs--were first domesticated by humans thousands of years ago. Approximately 100 years ago, dog owners started photographing their household pooches with Kodak box cameras. While cameras have changed over the last century, dogs haven't evolved much (sorry, Labradoodles don't count); we've found one pooch (right) that is exceptionally evolved, and has a lot to say about being photographed by humans with the latest digital cameras. We've edited Bowser's ruff text, and present it herein...

Sit. Stay. Good human.

Do you own a dog? That's nice. I like humans, and if you treat us well, we'll do anything for you. We'll even pose when you take pictures of us--no matter how badly those pictures may come out!

My master takes photos of me all the time. At first, the results weren't even worth paper-training myself on. But eventually he learned, and now he's a great photographer. Based on my experience training my master to be a great dog photographer, I've come up with 15 tips that will help you get memorable images of your best friend.

After all, I'm an expert. Who are you gonna listen to--me or some human?

7.1 Think like a dog. Study our habits. Look at how we behave when we need to go for a walk (not such a good time to take pictures), what we do after we eat (we lick our faces!), and how we are among human kids, other dogs, puppies (I love puppies!), with different people and in different places. This will help you to anticipate our actions.



I just ate! Want to get a shot like this? When poochie finishes chowing down, he'll lick his chops. Be ready. Photo © iStockphoto.com/Michael Svoboda

7.2 A contented dog is a good subject. Feed me. Let me sleep. When I'm happy, I can be at your beck and call. Give treats. Have a treat on hand. If you tell me to do something (like sit in front of the camera looking at you) I expect to be rewarded. Do it several times, and I'll cooperate like crazy. Mmmm, Dog Biscuits!

7.3 Get down to the dog's level. Don't make me strain my neck looking up at you! Get on your belly. If you're a stranger, put the camera down for a few minutes and play with me. Let me sniff you, get to know you. I pose better when you're not a stranger. Then, get those treats ready and start shooting away.



Eye-level: Get down to your dog's level and show his eyes--the windows into his canine soul. How did the photographer get this out-of-proportion head? By using a wide-angle lens. This show was taken using studio lights and an inexpensive white seamless backdrop. You could also take a shot like this with an on-camera flash with a diffuser. Photo © iStockphoto.com/Stephanie Phillips

7.4 Make eye contact. If I'm looking to the right or left, so will the person looking at your photo. Get my attention so I'm looking right at the camera. You can do that by making strange sounds. Really—it works! Clicks, whistling, mooing, even barking will get my attention. Sounds silly? This simple trick works on almost any dog as long as it's quiet enough for him to hear you. Make sure to focus on my eyes. Even if the front of my nose is out of focus, my eyes should be sharp. If they aren't, the photo will look like a mistake.

7.5 Get dogs doing dog stuff. If you want me to act naturally, put me in situations where I do the things I normally do. Like playing fetch. I love sticks and bite toys, especially when I'm young and teething. Frisbees, too. Get another human to do the throwing, though. Throwing and taking pictures at the same time looks rough.



Know what dogs like: We like to run, swim, and fetch. So, get pictures of us doing the stuff we like to do. Photo © iStockphoto.com/Seb Chandler

7.6 Check the light. As with any type of photography, make sure the light is right. Unless you have a studio, the outdoors is best. If you own a spoiled lapdog who never goes outside, try to take pictures near a window. Make sure my face is well lit. If I have dark fur, use a soft fill flash (with some kind of diffuser, please) or a large reflector to bounce light into my face. If you have neither, use center-weighted or spot metering, or overexpose 1-2 stops for dark-furred dogs.

7.7 Put us on a pedestal. For indoor photos, a small dog or puppy will probably stay where you put him—if that place is off the floor. A coffee table or something similar that's higher than the dog likes to jump, perhaps with a small rug or towel draped over it, can work a simple studio. Use an assistant to make sure poochie is in the right place. This way, you don't have to chase all over the place for a skittish subject.

7.8 Avoid Dog-Eye! Just like you humans have red-eye, we've got dog-eye. If you use a point-and-shoot camera with a built-in flash, and if the room light is a bit too dark, we may get a weird green glow in our eyes. I am not a werewolf—don't make me look like one. Whenever possible, avoid that built-in flash and use softer light instead. Use diffusion or bounce flash instead of straight-on flash. If you don't have that option, use anti-shake and/or boost your camera's ISO setting to increase its sensitivity in low light.

7.9 Get close. No, closer. No, closer than that. Fill the frame with my pugnacious mug. Don't be afraid to use your zoom to eliminate anything that isn't necessary.

7.10 Use humor. Go ahead. Humiliate me. Use wide-angle lenses and high angles to

make my head look distorted and funny. Put sunglasses and hats on me--then shoot fast, because I'll probably shake them off.



Pay attention to detail: Note how the little details make this funny photo work, from the starfish on the left to the just-breaking wave in the background. How many shots do you think it took to get this one? You can bet it took a lot--dogs generally don't enjoy wearing sunglasses! Photo © iStockphoto.com/James Steidl

7.11 Pay attention to detail. Look for potential distracting elements in the background and foreround, and either change position or move both of us to a better location if needed. Remember that things that might not be a distraction in the background when you're standing could tower over your photo when you're at my level.



Best friends: Humans are proud of their pooches, and we dogs love our people. We're like a part of the family so try to capture the mutual affection and pride of ownership when doing a shot with both dogs and people. Photo © iStockphoto.com/Sean Locke

7.12 Bath time is a good time to shoot. Although I hate baths, when I get out I shake all the water off my fur. I smell a photo opp! Bathe me outside. Set your camera to a fast shutter speed, and be ready. You can improve the shot by making sure the sun is somewhat behind me—those backlit drops flying through the air can make for a great shot. Even indoors, my drowned-rat look can be endearing (see above photo by Mason Resnick).

7.13 Puppies are always cute. This is a rule. Take lots of pictures of puppies. They're nice and adorable, and if you get them off the floor, they won't go anywhere.

Let's paws and review: Get on my level. Show my eyes. Don't be a stranger. Show me doing what I do best. Treat me like...well...like a dog. You'll be rewarded with pictures that will get other humans to sit up and notice!

7.14 What's in Bowser's Camera Bag?

I'm not a big fan of compact cameras. Reaction time is often too slow, and that harsh on-camera flash gives me "dog-eye". DSLRs, even [starter DSLRs](#), are better. I like Canon, but an equivalent Nikon, Olympus, or Pentax DSLR-based outfit, with a shoe-mounted flash and a flash diffuser to soften the effect, will produce nice flattering portraits of dogs...and humans, too!

—Bowser Z. Dawg

Chapter 8: Quick Tips for Point-and-Shoot Camera Users

Whether you're photographing your family at gatherings, on family vacations or holidays, here are five typical snapshooter no-no's and how to avoid them so you get better photos.

8.1 Lighten Deep Shadows on Faces in Bright Sunlight

When part of a face is thrown into deep shadow by bright overhead sunlight, the results are not flattering. Here's how to get better photos with your digital camera in the mid-day sun.



***Fix me!** It's high noon, there's not a cloud in the sky. You take pictures of your smiling loved ones. The result is a semi-abstract portrait, with the eyes obscured by deep, shadowy pockets that we call "raccoon eyes." The nose casts a dark mustache over the upper lip and mouth and...well, it's not a pretty picture.*

There are two ways to get rid of those dark shadows: Add more light, or move out of direct sunlight.



The easy fix: Add more light to blow away the shadows by turning on your camera's built-in flash, as I did above. Most point-and-shoot digital cameras sense when there's enough light that you don't need flash, but they're not smart enough to know when the lighting will cause deep shadows. In your camera's flash mode, switch from Auto to the little lightning bolt that indicates the flash is always on.

The more advanced fix: Use a reflector such as the [Flashpoint 22-Inch Circular Collapsible Disc Reflector](#) to bounce sunlight into your subjects' faces. Reflectors can provide a wider light surface, which results in more flattering lighting than a tiny on-camera flash can provide. You'll probably need an assistant to hold the reflector and aim the light while you're taking pictures.



The think-outside-the-box fix: Get out of the sun! Find an open shade area, and position your subject so the area behind is darker than (or the same level of brightness as) your

subject. I shot this about ten feet from where I took the first two shots, but what a difference turning around and shooting into the shade made here! Make sure your flash is turned off and your shake reduction is turned on.

8.2 Farewell, Fuzzy Faces Forever

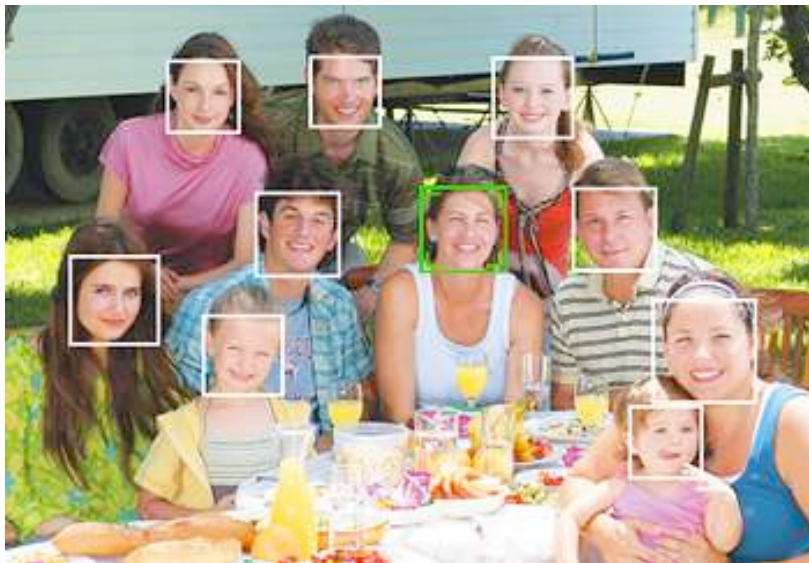
If are using an older autofocus camera, there may be times when focus "misses" your subject's face, and instead the background is in sharp focus while the person or people you're photographing are blurred.



Fix me! Older low-cost digital point-and-shoot camera focus systems will only focus on the exact center of the picture. If your subject is even slightly off-center, it won't be in focus. If you're shooting two people, as in the shot above, your camera may focus on the wall behind them if that's what's in the center of the picture, where the focus target is located. But that is one of the most easily-fixed snapshot foibles around.



The easy fix: First, center your subject in the frame. Press the shutter release halfway down. This locks focus. Now, with the release still pressed halfway, re-compose the picture the way you want it. Press the shutter release the rest of the way down.



The really easy, high-tech fix: Buy any modern digital point-and-shoot camera that has Face Recognition. Face Recognition (also called Face Detection), introduced in 2006, is one of those features we don't know how we ever survived without. If you bought a camera recently, you probably already have this feature at your fingertips! Example image at right demonstrates what your screen would look like with face recognition activated.

Face Recognition locks onto faces (from a single face to between 8 and 19, depending on the camera) and automatically adjusts focus and exposure so they come out sharp and well exposed, no matter where they are in the shot. You don't need to break the bank to

get a camera with Face Recognition, either; These days, Face Recognition can be found on nearly all compact digital cameras at all prices—check the specs!

8.3 No More Camera Motion Blur

One of the most common picture-taking mistakes is camera shake. But it's easier than ever to avoid. You've taken your picture and it looks all right on the tiny monitor, but when you review the photo back home on your computer screen, you notice that the entire image is blurred. This usually happens because you shook the camera slightly when you took the picture.

Camera motion blur is a common problem, made worse by the lack of eye-level viewfinders on most compact cameras. This forces you to hold the camera a foot or so from your face so you can see the LCD screen. Your arms are not supported and you are more likely to move the camera when you press the shutter release.



Shake, shake, shake: Shot at dusk, handheld, no tripod to keep the camera steady or shake reduction, and the flash is off. The camera compensates for the low light by increasing exposure time, during which the camera moved.

Traditional ways to fix shaky pictures are to:

- Lean your arms and camera against a wall or table for support
- Shoot while looking through the finder, if your camera has one
- Mount your camera on a tripod
- Shoot with flash in low light (see sample, above).



Flash on: Many cameras in auto mode will simply turn on the flash if the light's too low. In this case, I forced the flash on and got a sharp shot.

But there's another option: Anti-Shake Technology! All but the lowest low-end snapshot cameras now have some form of remediation for blur caused by the photographer moving the camera during the exposure, and unlike the direct flash, this provides for a more natural look (see image above). Look for vibration reduction, anti-shake, or some similar variation, on your camera's specs. Optical anti-shake will produce better image quality than digital anti-shake, which boosts ISO and causes graininess. Use this feature when shooting hand-held images and you will increase your chances of getting sharp shots.



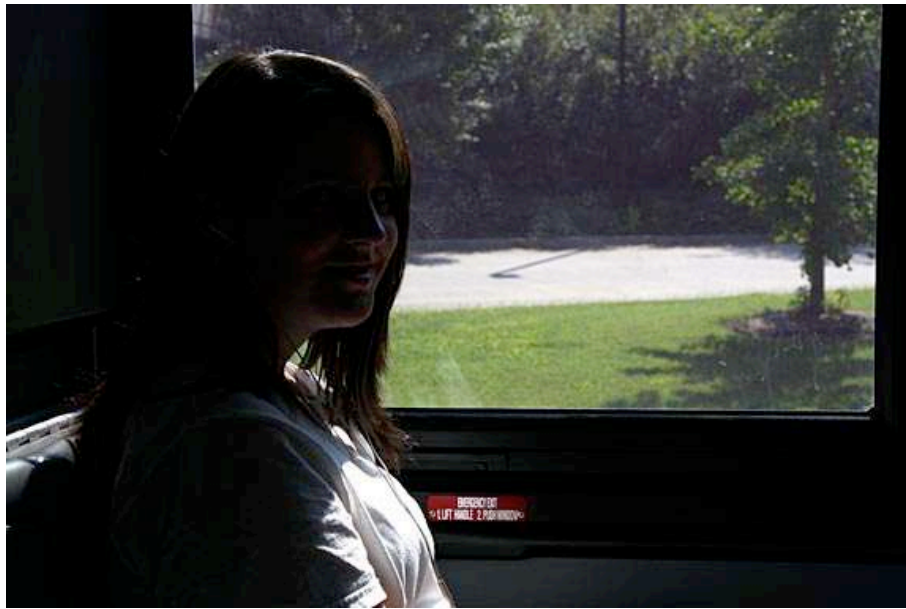
Shake reduction on: I turned on my compact camera's Shake Reduction, which eliminated hand shake and produced a sharp shot with more natural lighting (note the

lighter background). Most new compact digital cameras have anti-shake technology built-in. It works!

8.4 Is the Background Brighter than the Foreground?

Your subject is sitting by the window and you can see her face perfectly, but your digital camera can't. Here's why, and how to fix the problem.

Cameras don't like uneven light. So, when you point a camera at someone standing in shadow—indoors against a window, under an awning with a bright, sun-drenched scene behind them, and so on, you are likely to get a dark, featureless outline of them while the background is perfectly exposed.



***Perfect exposure of the outside scene**—but I want to see my daughter's face, and she's sitting inside a bus, where it's much darker. Something's got to give.*

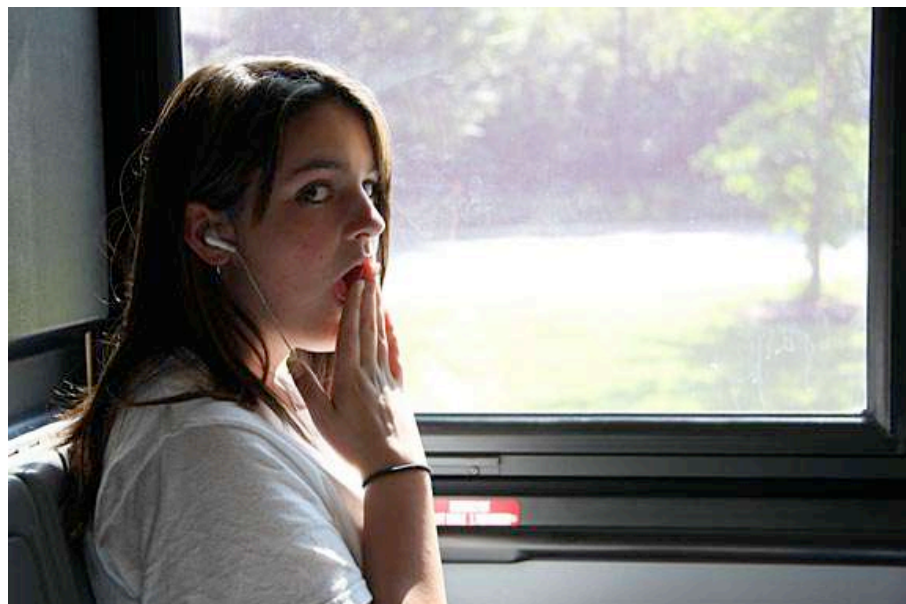
There are several ways to fix this:

Turn on your flash: Use your camera's flash as a fill-in light to balance out the brightness. Switch the flash setting from the default (auto flash) to flash always on (a lightening bolt). The downside? If you're shooting someone standing near a window, the flash will bounce right back at you, creating an unwanted bright spot.



Flash on: Now the foreground and background are balanced, but the reflection of the flash in the window is a distraction.

Use exposure compensation: A more advanced way to mitigate strong backlighting is to adjust the camera's exposure compensation. Increase it by two stops and the entire scene will be lightened. The downside is that the background will most likely be too bright, and there may be some flare, which means even though your subject might be better exposed, the contrast might be too low and details might be obscured.



Exposure compensation: I get a perfect exposure by boosting my camera's EV +1.5 stops. Now she's exposed perfectly, but the scenery is blown out. I'll take that compromise.

Use spot metering: Some cameras will let you selectively meter just the center area of

the picture, giving you the best exposure for the target area only while the rest of the picture will be over or underexposed, depending on the scene. Result is similar to what you'd get using exposure compensation.

Re-orient the subject: If none of the above works, move your subject so the light is shining on him or her, and the background is dark. In fact, if you're shooting near a window, the light coming in can be very flattering for a portrait subject.



Just one more: In a similarly-lit situation, I positioned my daughter so she would be lit from a window at right as the sole light source, and captured this softly lit, flattering portrait.

8.5 Beware Distracting Backgrounds

When taking photos of your friends and loved ones with your digital camera, pay attention to what's going on behind them. Otherwise, unintentional hilarity might ensue.

The human eye and brain have the amazing ability to see only what it wants to see. You look at a scene and subconsciously your brain and eyes work together to focus attention on whatever you feel is important and ignore what isn't. Cameras have no such ability, and they faithfully record everything they capture--whether you want them to or not.

Here's what could happen if you're not paying attention to what's going on in the background:



Next time you're photographing people—either individually or in groups—watch your background. If there's a tree behind someone's head, it will look like it's growing out of their head because the two dimensional print (or image on screen) flattens space, and plays tricks on your eyes.



The easy way: Move a bit. If you see a tree or similarly distracting element in the background, shift your position. That's what I did to fix the background in the image above. Moving a few inches or a couple of feet can help to reorganize the background so it's not fighting the foreground.

The more advanced way: Move a *lot*. If you see a hopelessly distracting background,

and no amount of lateral movement on your part is helping, move both you and your subject to another location entirely and avoid the distracting background.

Not sure if the background is distracting? After you've taken the shot, look at the image in preview mode. See a tree sticking out of Aunt Gussie's head? Change positions, and re-shoot!

—Mason Resnick

Chapter 9: Gear Guide

Good stuff for new parents who want to take exceptional photos of their babies

On the one hand, babies are incredibly easy to photograph because they're not very mobile, especially for the first few months. They're small, so you can get great photos in a confined space, such as a crib or bedroom.

If you are a new parent or are looking for a great photographic gift for friends or family with a new arrival, here are some gift ideas that won't break the bank but will help you make better baby pictures.



9.1 [Lensbaby Composer](#) with [Double-Glass Optic](#), [Soft-Focus Optic](#) and [Creative Aperture kit](#). Designed for use with most digital SLRs (there's a version of Lensbaby Composers in each brand's mount), this funky lens system will let you create distinctive images that will stand out. Besides from the fact that it's got "baby" in its name, the Lensbaby Composer is fantastic for selective focus and zooming in on baby and turning the background and out of focus areas into smooth, wonderful blurs that really bring you right in on the baby's eyes and face. Additionally, the soft-focus Optic, which is part of the Optic Swap System, provides a diffused crispness and glow to the baby's skintones. The Creative Aperture disks can be fun for themed photographs, especially around the holidays. Use a heart for Valentie's day, stars for Christmas, etc. Baby photos with Lensbaby can be a lot of fun



9.2 Flash Diffusers: Direct Flash plus babies isn't a great combination. You want to soften up the skin tones. Flash diffusers are the way to do this. For on-camera flash, [Ken Kobre's Lightscoop](#) (shown) or the [Lumiquest Soft Screen](#) are fantastic ways to soften indoor light. If you have an external flash that fits on your camera's hot shoe, check out the [Flashpoint Q-series Diffuser Dome](#) or [Flashpoint 16x16-inch Soft Box](#) for Shoe Mount Flashes.

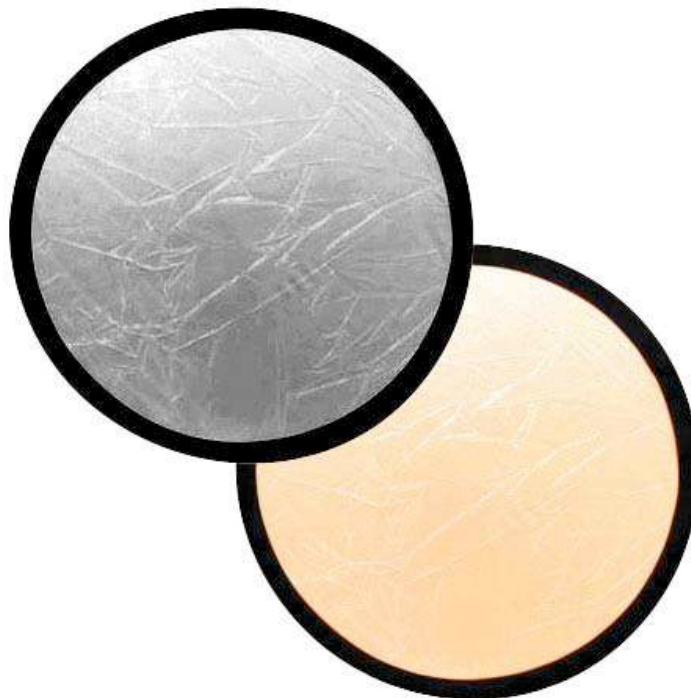


9.3 A fast(ish) [50mm](#) or [35mm](#) prime lens. Babies and a fast prime (single-focal-length) lens are a great combination, because a wider-aperture lens gives you much more light-gathering power. Often an f/1.4 lens is expensive. But if you sacrifice a tiny bit of light and accept an f/1.8, you can find a normal-range lens that won't break the bank. Why get a fast non-zooming lens? A couple of reasons: Beautiful background blur will

soften up even the busiest nursery background while you really focus in on baby's face and eyes, and at f/1.8, you can shoot in low light, up to 3 stops faster than a typical kit 18-55mm zoom lens will allow. In practical terms, this means you can shoot at 1/80 sec with the fast prime, instead of an un-holdable 1/8 second with the slower zoom lens.



9.4 [Eye-Fi Pro Card](#). Eye-Fi SD cards have built-in WiFi transmitters. Let's be honest: when you've got a little one in the house, you're busy and you forget things. An Eye-Fi Pro Card is a fantastic way to make sure your shots are automatically transferred from your camera to your computer. Pick a folder on your hard drive, set up your Eye-Fi Card and it will automatically transmit your still shots and video from your camera to your computer. You can even send photos directly from your camera to your favorite online printing site, such as [AdoramaPix](#).

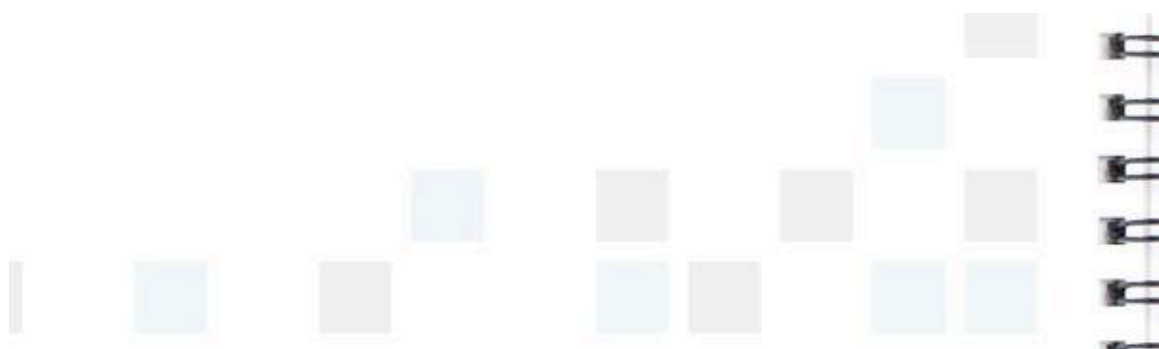


9.5 [Flashpoint 22-inch Small Silver/Gold reflector](#). These things fold up and can be carried anywhere conveniently. The silver side adds neutral fill light while the gold side adds warm fill light. This reflector can be used to bounce light into your little subject's face



9.6 [Flashpoint II 320 Monolight Kit](#). This is a wonderfully inexpensive setup for anyone who is ready to move beyond snapshots and set up a studio for baby photos and general family portraiture. At under \$150, you can buy two of these kits and you're ready to start a well-equipped travelling portrait studio!

—Jack Howard





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