

Family Group Photography Tips

Fine family portraiture like any other craft takes years of training and practice. Having said that, there are techniques that will improve your family portraits. Above all, having a plan before the photography session is the most critical; once you have people waiting there is considerable pressure and little time for creative decisions

Six Techniques to improve your group photography:

1. If you are lucky and have an overcast day, you can use any location that does not have a distracting background. If it is sunny you will have to find a location in the shade or have the light come from behind your subjects. Whenever possible seek out locations that have several levels to place subjects such as stairs or natural features. This will help realize the goal of not having two heads on the same horizontal or vertical line. Remember your camera exposure meter will be fooled by rear lighting. You will have to put your camera on manual.
2. Avoid photographing your subjects straight on, especially if they have weight issues. As a general rule, your subjects should have their weight on their rear leg. The knee of the weight free leg can be moved to create a more relaxed body position.
3. Use the longest lens you have with as large a lens opening as you can and still have the group in focus from front to back. This will cause the background to be out of focus, which will draw attention to your subjects.
4. With groups over six people it is hard to make a creative grouping, with fewer people try to apply as many elements of design as you can. Rule of thirds, leading lines, triangular, or circular composition. Imagine the entire group as a shape. Is it an interesting shape? One of the strongest shapes for family portraits is a triangle.
5. Use a tripod, especially for large groups, and don't change the zoom level once you start. This will allow you to change heads or expressions easily in Photoshop. With small babies and dogs you just have to make sure you have one good image then strip them into the best overall image. Tripods are also important when using the late evening light that is ideal for groups.
6. Getting good expressions is one of the most difficult things to do. Once the camera is set up be ready with the shutter trigger. Most people will not react if you say "smile" however they will smile or laugh if you do or say something they think is funny. Picking on a good natured person in the group is an easy way to get smiles. This good natured ribbing can start as you are setting up so it is read when you need a smile.

Five Tips for Better Outdoor Group Portraits

1. Avoid photographing subjects straight on. Have them put all weight on their back leg.
2. Find a background that will not distract from your subjects. Avoid including the sky if possible.
3. Find a location where your subjects will not be in the direct sunlight.
4. Make use of the Rule of Thirds.
5. Try to arrange your subjects so no two heads are on the same horizontal or vertical line.