

# Spring Portrait Pointers

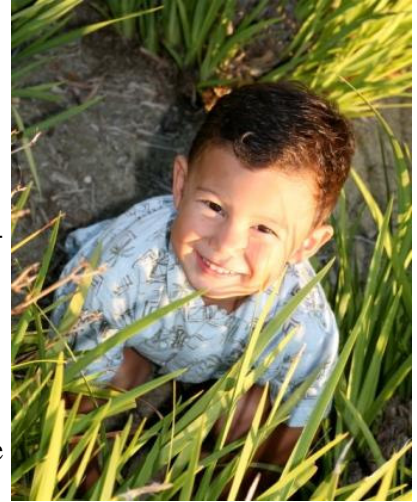
## Tips for Perfect Photos of Babies and Toddlers

by Kim Seidel

As a mother of two and a professional photographer, Monica Michelle enthusiastically tells parents how much she loves spring portraits for babies and toddlers.

"This is a wonderful time to take your child out to the garden," says Michelle, owner of White Rabbit Portrait Studios, San Mateo, Calif. "Photos of your crawler going through green grass or showing your just-standing baby next to your growing plants make great photos."

Don't be afraid to get in close to your child with a camera. "Show your baby's fingers stroking leaves and petals," she says. "Photograph their face as you have someone hold a blossom up for them to smell. This is an amazing new environment, full of new sites and smells, for your little one to explore. You will get some great shots of their smiles and curiosity."



Put them in simple clothing to help focus in on your child's special expressions, rather than their outfit. Even a baby wearing a diaper is an adorable photograph, Michelle says, and you can never go wrong dressing a baby or toddler in plain old overalls for their photograph.

### Simple and Personal

Photographers across the country echo Michelle's advice on dressing young children simply for their pictures. They offer many other inspiring suggestions for parents dreaming of capturing their children on film this spring.

"I like to tell parents to dress their babies and toddlers in neutral colors, with patterns kept to a minimum," says Karyn Giss, owner of Karyn L. Giss Photography in Los Angeles, Calif. "After all, what you're trying to capture is the essence of your baby, a moment in time, that special expression that you've seen yourself 100 times. Black and white photographs, as well as no crazy patterns on clothing, keep the focus on the baby's face, exactly where you want it."

Like Michelle, Giss prefers photographing children in nature. "The location should be somewhere the baby/toddler is most comfortable, which includes their home, or a neighborhood park, even the beach can work," she says. "All of these have wonderful, natural backdrops for beautiful portraits. I don't generally use props or artificial backdrops, finding nature to be perfect for both. Sometimes a toddler playing with a rock can be a stunning portrait."

If you do want props in your child's photo, bring your child's favorite toy, blanket, book or anything else you would like to include in your portraits. "Personal items help capture a better sense of your child's personality," says Elizabeth Scully, owner of Lasting Impression Portrait Studio, Hampton Bay, N.Y.

Personalizing your child's photo – with props or backgrounds – is a wonderful way to create a

memorable spring picture. This also helps your child to feel comfortable during a photo shoot, surrounded with familiar items.



A professional photographer and mother to a toddler, Diana Berrent, owner of Diana Berrent Photography of New York, N.Y., is familiar with the challenges and excitement of photographing children. "Find a scene that matches your child's interests," Berrent says. "Do you have an antsy toddler who won't stay still? Find a tree with a low slung branch and prop your little child in the tree. They will stay still and you will be guaranteed a big smile from your little one."

Berrent also recommends having a damp washcloth on hand for any face cleaning; this is a much better tool than a tissue or paper towel for that stubborn runny nose.

Do you want your baby's wide-eyed gaze directed to the camera? Have someone shake a rattle or squeeze a toy that makes animal sounds right above the photographer's head, Berrent says.

When meeting the photographer for a session, treat it like a fun game, a special experience to be shared with your child, Giss says. "Talk about who is coming, or who you are going to see; say his or her name so the baby is comfortable hearing it," she says. "That way when the photographer shows up, the child is familiar with them and sees them as a friend."

Timing also is everything. Plan your little one's photo shoots when they're typically in their best mood, rather than during nap times or after a long day. "Parents should allot 30 to 60 minutes for the photo session," Giss says. "This time range accounts for feeding, changing and other needs of a child during a shoot."

For parents, it's so important to go with the flow. If a baby or child senses Mom feels uptight about the session, they'll be more likely to feel stressed too – which unfortunately will reflect in the photos, Giss says.

### Taking Photos on Your Own

With digital cameras, it's easier today for parents to take exceptional pictures, rather than depending on a professional portrait studio. "There are a lot of great, digital single-lens reflex (digital SLR or DSLR) cameras out there that are reasonably priced," says Sandra Coan, owner of Sandra Coan Photography in Seattle, Wash. "They can be programmed to be fully automatic. The nice thing about using a digital SLR is that you don't get the delay you get with most point and shoot cameras."

To avoid red eye, don't use the flash on the camera, Coan says. Instead, sit your child in front of a window and shoot from an angle to avoid back lighting; the natural light is very pretty, she says.

"One of my favorite tricks when photographing babies is to put a sticker on their belly or foot," Coan says. "They'll spend a long time trying to get it off, and you'll get some great candid-looking photos of them playing with their toes and tummies."

Shooting pictures outdoors can be difficult, Coan says. Be mindful of the light. "The biggest mistake people make is putting their kids in bright sunshine," she says. "This causes big shadows on the face, as

well as squinty kids. Look for a big patch of shade, where the light is even. Everyone will be happier."

Jonathan Payne, owner of Jonathan Payne Photography, Oakland, Calif., offers more tips for parents eager to take their own photos:

- Get down low. "You want to be down at eye level with the kids. I spend a lot of time down on my stomach with the babies. As an alternative, use a bed or couch to get the kids at an easier level to photograph."
- Get close. "Fill the viewfinder with a face, or better yet just some details of your child, like their ears, hands or feet," Payne says. "It's important to figure out how close your camera will focus, and maybe even switch into the macro mode if it's available."
- Turn off your flash. "Nothing kills a nice photo like a blast of harsh light from the camera," Payne says. "The flip side of this tip is that you need to find good light. Basically, look for big windows, with indirect light, like those facing north."



Other strong possibilities for taking superior photos in natural light include porches, doorways, or shady areas of the yard facing the open sky.

"Most importantly, just have fun and take a lot of photos," Coan says. "These little ones grow and change so quickly."