

Photography and Kids: Teaching the Basics

Children are prime students when it comes to cameras (digital or film!). Here's a 101 for parents on guiding them in capturing memories for all seasons.

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The first – and only – place to start with capturing life through a camera is in knowing what's pretty, touching, shocking. It starts with what you're attracted to. There's no right or wrong!

With your kids, start by reading print publications filled with photographs and decide which are most interesting. Is it bright and colorful? Maybe, it's in stark black and white. Animal shots or fashionable people? How about skyscrapers, ancient ruins or sunflowers growing wild?

What "speaks" to you? What causes reactions, feelings or actions? Decide why the picture "works." Is it the object's closeness, a story told, shocking emotion shown or something else? What was the photographer saying – and did it succeed? Analyze it as a family.

Early beginnings

Award-winning photojournalist Linda Solomon of Bloomfield Township built a career on taking celebrity photos, but she prefers teaching children. She's given more than 1 million free cameras to kids, centering projects around them, like "Pictures of Hope" and "My Hope for America."

"I received my first camera from my dad when I was 5," she says. "It changed my life."

Getting that camera, and a leather photo album when she was 13, were important tools in her passion for photography.

Have you heard about the birth photography trend? Learn more here.

She still has that album and continues encouraging children – having them capture symbols of their dreams or hopes.

Equipment: Bells and whistles?

When photographers "shoot," they hunt with cameras, aiming and capturing a trophy of sorts. Shooting with digital equipment saves on developing film, as with traditional cameras – not only while learning, but also overall. And today's digitals can handle every event from Amazonian vacations to formals.

Some artists argue that the higher the mega-pixels, the better quality the photos. But a talented photographer with "the eye" captures a moment with a \$5 disposable as well as a \$1,000 model. A lot depends on seeing, then framing, surroundings.

Focus and intent are as important. When shooting a bride in a candid moment, cutting off her head won't work. So it's best to know your equipment – whether a camera phone or single-lens-reflex (SLR) and more. Study the settings thoroughly before investing a lot of money, or time, in expensive extras. Then tackle the math that apertures (light openings) and other operations involve.

Family fun includes working with the pictures on the computer – from cropping unnecessary background and changing hues, saturation, blurring or sharpening to adding a frame, text boxes and so on. To download digital shots to a computer, software is needed; some online versions are free. Most cameras come with software CDs or instructions on what to buy.

How to look at things

Kids have a different view of the world because they are young – *and* smaller. They experience close-ups adults can't – from knees at a parade to bees on a low flowerbed.

Practice shooting trees from the edge of a field or get close-up details of a sleeping cat's paw. Aim at the sun or clouds, then the grass and ants; don't be afraid to be creative. Capture things reflected in windows, mirrors or puddles. With progress, any automatic flash won't cause problems.

Notice details in something by taking pictures of it from different angles. Shoot a barn from the side of the road; then another shot of just its doors. Last, take a close-up of the handle on the door.

Study the changes – from the addition of sky and clouds in one, to the worn wood with the grain in the doors, to the rusty metal on the handle against the wood. Put the three together, comparing. See the "big picture" taken from far away, the "little picture" up close and the "link," or middle picture, in between.

Discover hidden details by shooting feathers, food, toothbrush bristles. Learn to shoot close but not cause blur, or to blur photos for a dreamy quality. First use the automatic settings; then venture into different settings, light, filters and effects.

Weather and safety

It doesn't just have to be sunny to shoot pictures. Shade, cloudy days, rain or ice create special effects, as does a full moon and shadows. Shooting objects in shadow, with light in the background, creates an interesting silhouette effect.

Always be alert when shooting. Don't be so distracted that danger looms. Beware of falls, tripping hazards, traffic or aggressive animals. Just as shots are anticipated, watch for problems. Sharing as a family ensures buddy safety, too.

Make it grow

Once the basics are mastered, learn new ways to use photography. Make greeting or holiday cards from pictures, and

Discover other ways to give your kids an art smart edge - with tips from photographer Linda Solomon and other southeast Michigan artists.

frame photos as decor and for gifts. Combine groupings, like the barn views, or multiple views of an animal or musical instrument.

Include photos with schoolwork. Enter contests. Look at life as if through the camera's eye. Focus close – or far away.

Preserve memories by capturing time standing still. As a piece of your life and history, see why photographers are passionate about carrying cameras.

If a picture's worth 1,000 words, it's because so much is said to so many different people. Practicing with your camera will make it a family affair worth much more.