

The Preparation Guide to Family Portraits

The following is a list of Do's and Don'ts recommendations to prepare for your family portrait photo shoot. These are only a guide and not intended as a weapon of right or wrong, the intention of a family portrait is to have fun and breaking some rules is okay.

The Do List

Dress Comfortably - Many family portraits will have a clothing theme or color. Be sure that your clothing is in line with the theme; wear darker themed colors to appear thinner.

Be Positive – Trying to have an authentic smile while being mad or stressed does not work well. Do everything possible to arrive in an upbeat and light-hearted mood. The photos will be around for years to come and you do not want to be the relative that everyone jokes about for being the downer in the group.

Look at the Camera – Besides holding a pose, your job is to look at the camera at all times. Little Johnny or Grandma Sally can be acting silly, but you must stay strong and resist the urge to look. The urge to look will be like a magnet to steel but you can succeed.

Be on time and Prepared – Arrive on time and ready to get busy. If everyone is ready, the entire photo session can take under one hour. That is a small amount of torture to please the person wanting the family portrait.

Speak Up – Say something if you are uncomfortable or unable to hold a pose. The larger the group, the longer it may take to work from one end to the other to get people posed. Any concern is worth attention. Nobody wants to fall over due to a leg that went to sleep.

The KISS Method – Keep It Simple and Smile. The more elaborate the requests can oftentimes mean more work from the participants; they may not like you very much after the session. Keep it simple and keep smiling.

The Don't List

Patterns and Colors – When dressing for a theme, do not wear the same color top and bottom, the perfectionist in you may have a moment but the picture will look better when there is contrast.

Busy patterns will drive the camera crazy and be a distraction to the flow of the picture. Coach the flamboyant member of the family to leave the creative colors at home and to stay within the color theme.

Stiff and Starch – Do not wear clothing that will wrinkle just by looking at it or has so much starch that you cannot bend your arm. As the session goes along, your comfort level will decrease.

That's too tight! – If you want to look thinner by wearing clothing two sizes too small, well, you know what that looks like. You can layer loose fitting clothing and be comfortable while looking great. Stay away from White and Pastel clothing if weight is a concern.

The kids won't leave – Resist looking around at the fuss made by the little one. The camera wants to see your eyes and not your profile or top of your head. Besides, if you stay in the room the kids will also. I will work with the kids to get them into position. I have yet to lose a child during a photo shoot.

Expense does not mean quality – Expensive clothing items do not have a special appeal to the camera, so avoid buying expensive clothing to match the desired theme. The key is to make sure that the clothing colors blend well and that the fabric is similar to the others. That goes back to KISS.

Do not be late – Feeling rushed is not a good way to begin your portrait session. If you have to tell your sister that the 3pm shoot is at 2pm, well, she will love you later when looking at the wonderful relaxed faces of the group in the pictures.