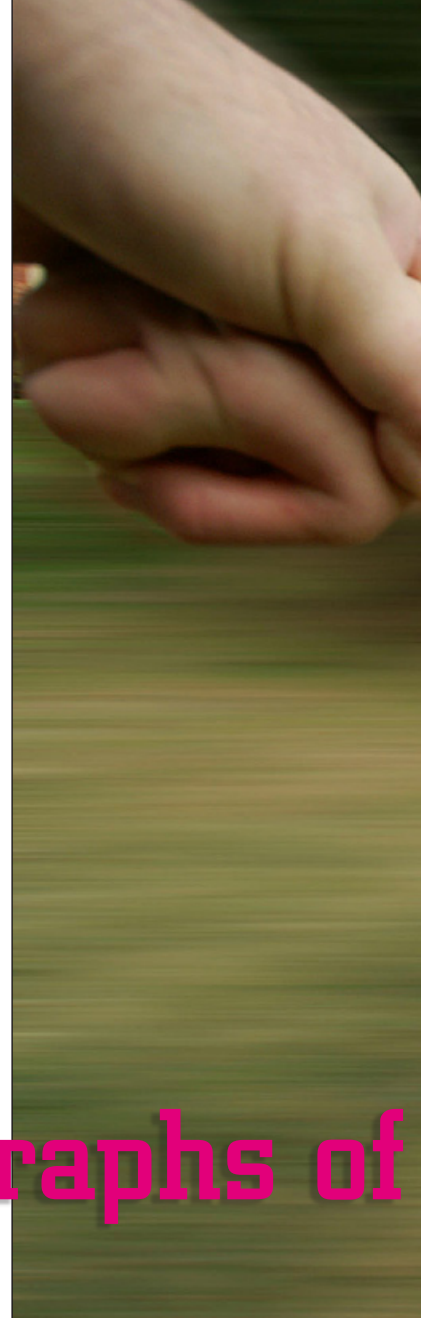


Gary's number one lesson is to make a photo session with children – of any age including mums – great fun. Kids love fun pictures as well. Here are three of Gary's classics. Simple ideas, but they work, don't they? You need a very confident parent to attempt the wide-angle shot top right, and a bit of practice. It was taken using the 11-18mm wide-angle set to 11mm, on a Dynaflex 7D digital body. 'Lena holding Lousia' below it might look wide angle, but Gary used the 28-75mm f2.8 lens at 75mm – and f22.



Taking better photographs of

says award-winning photobook author Gary Friedman

Say, “cheeeeeeeeeese!” If you're after an outstanding portrait of your children, invoking this very common (yet perpetually ineffective) gimmick is a formula for disaster.

Having kids say “Cheese” forces an unnatural expression which doesn't even approximate a smile. Why keep doing something that doesn't work??

I've shot children most of my life, and I have amassed a nice variety of techniques for getting very natural, very pleasing portraits which parents say really captures the true spirit of their child. I hesitate to call them “tricks”, since that implies a degree of deception; but nevertheless it's really an appropriate term.

There is certainly nothing earth-shattering in these techniques; these are the same tricks used by all child-shooting pros since the invention of film. Perhaps the real value is being able to articulate some of them all in one place, with the

understanding that combining two or more of these formulas may be enough to go from a great shot to a shot which makes people say, “Wow!”.

Say, “Squid!”

Your timing has to be perfect with this technique. All kids are taught to say “Cheese”, but none of them have ever been told “Say ‘Squid!’”.

At first they'll comply; and then a split second after you take your first picture, they'll realize that that's a ridiculous word to say, and will then break into a natural smile. It only lasts for a second or two, so be ready for it!!

Lens Baby

Very young toddlers instinctively understand eye contact with humans, but rarely will they naturally peer into a glass Cyclops. That's usually why they won't look at the camera while your eye is behind the viewfinder.

There are two good ways around this. First, if the toddler is relatively

still, set the camera on a tripod, focus manually, and then peek your head from behind the camera and make direct eye contact. When your baby looks at you, snap the picture. You'll need a magnifying glass to determine that the baby is actually looking just slightly off centre.

Another great technique is to keep a whistle in your mouth and use it only when you're ready to shoot. This technique becomes less effective with use, so use it sparingly. For those of you who want to go to extremes, paint your camera with bright primary colors, and put lots of flashing lights and noisemakers around the lens.

Earning Trust

Just as a doctor encourages young patients to play with a stethoscope to take the ‘edge’ off a first medical visit, so too have I found that letting new subjects hold my camera, look through the viewfinder and even take a few shots just to acclimate

to the “big scary looking professional camera”. Pose for each other, take some shots, and review them together. I find about 15-20 minutes of this is enough to get your subject warmed up and comfortable in front of the camera.

The Polaroid Effect

Before the digital era, whenever I'd travel I'd always take a Polaroid SX-70 camera with me. This proved indispensable in “breaking the ice” with complete strangers, even if I had no command of their language – usually I'd make eye contact, say “Hello!” using universal body language, and ask if I could take their picture. Kids love the attention.

At first I'd take just one shot and share it with them; then a few more which I would offer as a gift. By this time they love getting to know a stranger through this medium, and they even volunteer to do more poses! Then the good camera came



CHILDREN... it's kids' play!



out and I'd get some remarkable shots of young subjects at ease. Note: Don't try this technique when visiting America. They'll arrest you for approaching strange children! It's weird over here. Editor's note: it's weird in Britain as well – if you are shooting candid portraits, or even taking a camera to a school open/sports day as a parent, expect to be challenged or asked to stop.

Today of course you can employ the screen on your digital camera to achieve the Polaroid effect, or better yet plug it into a TV and watch their excitement as they see themselves on the telly! This ALWAYS gets kids comfortable and excited, but be careful to use this technique sparingly, for once the child realises that this is really a high concentration of attention on THEM, their excitement levels might become too great.

Colourful Attire

'Nuff said. Solid colours are best; clothing (especially T-shirts) with pictures and words are usually a distraction.

Environmental portraits

Besides the classical portrait composition (where the eyes of the subject are positioned in the upper third of the frame, and shot with a mild telephoto like 100mm/35mm equivalent), another method I enjoy using is the "environmental portrait", where you show off the person where they feel most at home. With kids, this will either be in their bedrooms or in an activity they thrive in, like sports. Wide angle lenses (like 28mm or even wider) are the tool to use here.

Go for the unusual

Here's the most difficult part to write about – the "something different and unusual" category. It's difficult because you just can't tell someone "do something different" and then go on to talk about technical stuff. That's the problem with magazine articles.

However, I will talk about how I got the shot which has garnered the most comments over the years, which is the one of the child swinging in circles and holding onto my hands. How was this shot??? It took about an hour from start to finish. I started with a KM 7D and the 11-18mm lens strategically strapped to my shoulders chest using bungee cords, and then I attached a Remote Release cord RC-100L (which has a mechanism for locking the shutter release button in the "down" position. I put the camera



Props make good photos, above and below – and so does diffused light with plenty of reflected fill-in. Upper photo on Dimage 7i, lower photo on Dimage A2. Facing page – top, colourful T-shirts work well but slogans are to be avoided. This Cuban boy's T-shirt motif is just small enough not to spoil the shot! Below, both sepia and black and white can be appropriate for portraits of children. Window light is always worth seeking out, and activities like combing hair make unusual shots.



into Manual focus and manual exposure mode, with a shutter speed of 1/15th of a second (to create the background blur), and the *f*-stop to match the light level. Then I locked the shutter release button on the remote release cord, and put it into my pocket. Since the camera is set to "continuous shooting" mode, the camera was now shooting about 2.5 frames per second all by itself. Then I picked up my niece and started spinning! It took about eight tries and a few *hundred* JPEG shots (plua a lot of breaks from being dizzy!) until I got the shot I had originally envisioned.

Light, Light, Light!

Being a *Photoworld* reader, you probably already know this, but the right light is such an important ingredient to any outstanding shot that it's irresponsible not to mention it. It took me many years to realize that just because the light looks good to the human eye doesn't mean it will look good on film (or digital).

Nothing makes or breaks a photo like good light. Nothing. Be aware of it, develop an eye for seeing light as the camera sees it, and after awhile you'll just know where the soft light is and how to position your subject so the light creates the illusion of depth on the face. I use window light a lot for my portraits; and sometimes I'll have someone hold a reflector on the other side of the subject to bring up the shadows. If your camera supports wireless flash, use it off to one side with a softbox or umbrella for very professional-looking images.





Give it some warmth

Purists would disagree with me on this, but I have found that adding a tinge of red and yellow to a portrait in post-processing helps to give it a “warmer” feel than with perfectly calibrated white balance.

You can also use the ‘Portrait’ colour setting on the Sony Alpha 100, which warms up skin tones selectively.



Gary Friedman is the author of several downloadable e-books on using Dimage, Dynax and Alpha cameras – see www.friedmanarchives.com

