

# Take better photos of your family

*this  
holiday  
season*



Photos by Todd Wurth



Don't just line them up and shoot. Compose your family photos with care.

By Amanda N. Wegner

Once the last shot of eggnog is thrown back, it's time to check out all the great family photos you took this holiday season.

But when you start clicking the perfect-looking thumbnails, you realize all those smiles and "say cheese" commands were for naught: The pictures are blurry, blown out and just plain bad.

It's time to take better pictures of your family this holiday season. Our pros offer tips for success.

## Tell stories

Holiday photos should tell a story, says Jim Post, who works at The Camera Company's downtown location and has been teaching

photography mini courses through UW-Madison for four years. "Don't always take close-up pictures of people opening presents and such. Take a close-up of little Johnny opening his present. Take a couple of shots of family member reactions. Take a wide shot of everyone watching Johnny. Pictures are one of the ways we reinforce memories. Taking photos that reflect the whole day is a good way to keep those memories alive!"

## Fill the frame...

Not "filling the frame" is a common mistake. "I've seen a lot of pictures that have little tiny people in them; you have to squint to make them out. Whatever the main subject is, it's a good idea to close in on it," says Post.

Filling the frame is particularly important if the intent of the photo is to show little Johnny's expression, adds professional photographer Amy Lynn Schreck.

## ...But know your camera

If you're using a basic point-and-shoot digital camera, however, Post recommends not getting too close — or too far away. "Most of these cameras will over-flash the subject, [and] their built-in flashes are also pretty much useless beyond 15 feet, so don't stay too far away. Know what your camera can do!"

Schreck echoes that point. "Knowing your equipment can help you take better pictures. Knowing basic photography techniques

can help you use your camera's settings to better capture the moment the way you see it with your eyes," she says. "At its simplest, it's just a tool. The more you know how to use it, the greater your chances are that you'll have more successes than failures."

### Compose and pose

Another common mistake Schereck often sees is centering the person in the middle of the frame. While centering may seem logical, practice the rule of thirds instead, one of the most basic composition guidelines in photography.

"The rule of thirds explains what part of an image the human eye is most strongly drawn toward first," says Schereck.

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- Jim Post  
The Camera Company

Before you snap the photo, imagine your picture area divided into thirds both horizontally and vertically. The four corners where these imaginary lines intersect are the strongest focal points. "The lines themselves are the second-strongest focal points," says Schereck.

When photographing the extended family, it's important to pose people to ensure everyone's face is visible.

"You want to pose them in a way that doesn't stack their heads on top of each other like a totem pole," adds Schereck.

### And "one" more tip

Take multiple photos. It increases your chances of having at least one good picture.



Amanda N. Wegner is a freelance writer in Madison and has found the "take multiple photos" tip to be most helpful when photographing toddlers.

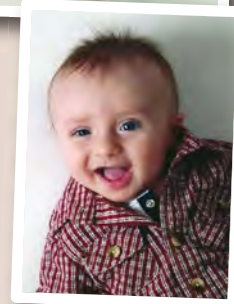
## Studio time

Or, you can leave it to someone else to get it right.

Suzie Wilkinson, owner of Madison's Photo Express and Express Portraits, offers these tips to ensure great family photos at your studio sitting:

- Choose a time when kids and babies are well rested. Don't schedule a sitting during naptime or right before bed.
- Don't change your look just for the photo. "When people look at the photos, they want to see you and your child as you really look," says Wilkinson.
- Dress casually. "You don't want to feel like you're coming in costume."
- For kids, feel free to bring something familiar, like a favorite toy or cherished teddy. It will add personality to the photo, but also offer a sense of security.

For the holidays, be sure to schedule your group photo as soon as possible. And if you have a large group, cautions Wilkinson, make sure the studio is large enough to accommodate everyone.



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