



COMPOSE

INSPIRING CONFIDENCE BEHIND THE CAMERA WITH BERYL AYN YOUNG



Love your photos
LOVE YOUR LIFE



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Welcome, friend

I'm Beryl and I'm so glad you're here. Won't you settle in for a bit? Go grab a cup of iced coffee (or hot tea, if that's your preference) and stay awhile. I'd love to connect, share my story, hear yours, and invite you on life's journey with me. We'll bond over our love of our little ones, Chipotle's guacamole, TOMs shoes, and of course photography.

I believe that there is magic hidden inside your camera, and I'm here to help you discover it.

I am a professional photographer by chance. A teacher to the core.

I was the kid who used to line up my stuffed animals on the rug and showed them what I did in school that day. The piper of our block who led the little kids in a marching chorus of song and dance around the neighborhood. The teenager who volunteered at the local elementary school and fell in love with the idea of 'lifelong learning' and 'making and impact' on the lives of America's youth.

I worked in Elementary school classrooms for 10 years, teaching Kindergarten and First Grade students how to read and write and then teaching teachers and students how to embrace technology and teach creatively in the 'digital age.'

I became a mom for the first time when I found out we were expecting on Mother's Day in 2009.

I fell in love with photography as a way to document this exciting time, and then fell in love with it all over again when

I needed healing after our tragic loss at 20 weeks pregnant. A year later in 2010 I became a mom for a second time when I gave birth to my beautiful, vibrant, inquisitive, blonde hair, blue-eyed, rainbow girl Brielle. Every day she teaches me the importance of happiness, lightheartedness, and big dreaming.

I know how quickly it feels like life is whizzing by. How busy it can be. How after becoming a mama you may have 'lost your spark'. How your kids are growing up way too fast. How you have a camera (or two or three), but you aren't capturing the memories you're going after. How there never seems to be any time. I know because I've been there.

I'm here to help.

That's why I put together this signature issue of *Compose*. It's packed with all my best secrets for improving your confidence behind the lens so you can snap amazing photos and focus on what matters most, connecting with your kids and family.

Happy reading!

xo, Beryl



The surprising problem

KEEPING YOU FROM ORGANIZING AND PRINTING YOUR PHOTOS



HER CLOSET USED TO BE THIS EXPANSIVE SPACE I COULDN'T IMAGINE FOR THE LIFE OF ME FILLING WITH HER THINGS. AND THEN ONE, JUST LIKE THAT, THERE WAS NO MORE ROOM FOUR YEARS LATER.

You could mark the passage of time with the floor to ceiling boxes of barely worn clothing that took up much of the space. These were the items that proved our little girl was no longer baby or toddler. Also thrown into the mix the baby items that help us cling to memories of her smallness: the tub, the noise machine, Halloween costumes, crib bedding, burp cloths, and extra diapers.

The closet was just a cross section of what was happening around our whole house. Stuff accumulating with little room to contain it all. The toys, art supplies, games, puzzles, dishes all overflowing from every nook and cranny of our house.

Every time I'd look at our mess of a house I'd go on what I like to call a 'binge cleaning session' where purging and sorting simply equated to hiding things in new drawers or spaces with no rhyme or reason. But, then a few short days later the house would return to its usually state of: toys strewn about, mail piled on the kitchen table, and dishes filling the sink.

Then, I began the process of bringing a new class, Embrace, into the world.

It's a fantastic mix of connecting the whole family through photography through printed pictures and unique photo lessons.

A big part of the course involves me organizing and printing my own photos so I can help you do the same with yours. But, every time I'd set to work at my computer planning, writing, organizing, printing, and conquering the course material I couldn't focus.

Instead I'd start thinking about or looking at that closet filled to the brim with too many clothes, the dirty laundry piles that needed to be washed three days ago, and the mess of toys cluttering the floor of our family room with no basket to call home.

The more I tried to 'embrace the mess because they're only little once' like so many of my friends and parenting sites encouraged, the more frustrated and panicky I'd become.

This mama doesn't operate well with mess and if you're a mama like me you may have found this to be true as well. Surprisingly the mess was keeping me from concentrating on anything else or putting my true desires higher up on my priority list.



Don't let your external clutter feed the internal clutter keeping you from your desires.

If you've ever put off getting your house clean or decluttered by sucking yourself into the vortex of email, Facebook, Pinterest, or BuzzFeed than you might know what I'm talking about

Those times where we play mental games of procrastination because the project we really need to accomplish gets too overwhelming. So, we busy ourselves with something mindless that feels more fun but really we're just pushing aside the opportunity to clear space for our real desires.

The mess in our house felt so huge that I blocked out everything else that held priority on my to do list instead of simply clearing something.

Instead of spending my evenings chipping away at the mess in small chunks, I'd procrastinate by chatting with



friends online, playing another round of Candy Crush, or binge watching Parenthood.

The start of a new school year is the perfect time for a fresh start on what you want to accomplish whether that be purging the clutter in your house, starting that art project you've been saying you want to do for months, or printing that photo book that's been on the bottom of your to-do list for waaaaay to long.

I'll tell you once I finally cleared space Brielle's closet, all of a sudden the path to my true desire (printing my photos while creating a new e-course) became a whole lot clearer too.

Today I'm encouraging you to start small and clear some of the external clutter that's holding you back. Go sort,

plan, organize, learn, delete, arrange, or clean:

- The pile of mail on your desk
- The disorganized playroom toys
- The dirty dishes in the sink
- The huge load of laundry you've been putting off
- That overflowing closet full of clothes
- The refrigerator or pantry full of expired food
- The junk drawer
- Your nightstand
- The playroom
- The mess of files taking up space on your computer desktop
- Your meal plan for the week

What external clutter do you need to get rid of to clear your internal clutter? Why not tell me about it in an [email](#). I promise once you do it's going to make space for all those other awesome projects you want to get accomplished this year.



Be the director of your photos! Give the kids prompts, guidance and direction for what they could do to make a cute photo worthy moment.

My 20+ favorite

PHOTOGRAPHY RESOURCES FOR MOMS



Photo credit: Past student: Shelia Hancock

IF I HAD A NICKEL FOR EVERY TIME A MOM ASKS ME WHAT CAMERA I HAVE, WHAT LENSES I USE, WHERE I GET MY PHOTOS PRINTED, OR WHAT ACCESSORIES I LOVE, I SWEAR I'D BE RICH!

As you probably very well know, there is certainly not a shortage of options when it comes to resources for momtographers. It can be overwhelming deciding who has the best prices, the most stellar customer service, or the highest quality products.

What I've laid out here are the sites, services, and resources that have become some of my FAVORITES over time. Know that I am also an affiliate for some of these lovely vendors below (meaning I get a bit of a cut when you purchase from 'em), but I have very carefully selected and chosen who I support and share with you.

The vendors listed below have given me the most personal attention, the best customer service, the highest quality products, and they're the ones I am proud to work with again and again and again. I hope you find the same.

Camera Gear

#1 Amazon – Prime membership = 2 days free shipping on any of my photography equipment. Need I say more?

#2 Adorama – They have some stellar deals on both new and used camera equipment. My refurbished Nikon 5100 camera came from them and I can't say enough good things about their customer service.

#3 B&H – Their flagship store in NYC is amazing, so would you expect anything less from their online experience? This place specializes in photo gear so you know you're getting the experts when you shop here.

What's in my camera bag?

- Nikon D3s body
- Nikon D5100 body
- Sigma 50mm 1.4
- Nikkor 35mm 1.8 DX
- Nikkor 28mm 1.8
- Nikkor 105mm 2.8 Macro
- Nikkor 24-70mm 2.8
- Lensbaby

Photo Editing

#4 PicMonkey – My go to online based FREE photo editor. They've got some awesome paid features you can unlock when you sign up for their affordable subscription plan. This is the first place I'd go if you're tech shy and just starting out in learning how to edit.

#5 Pixlr – Another free online editing resource. It's like a

lite version of Photoshop at your fingertips.

#6 Adobe Photoshop Elements – Ready to graduate from PicMonkey or Pixlr and into something more robust? Elements has all the features you'll need to make your photos pop.

#7 Adobe Lighroom – Affordable 'pro grade' photo editing software that once you master it will have you editing photos in quick batches to save you time.

#8 The Coffee Shop Blog – Want some free photo effects to get you started with Photoshop or Lightroom? Visit my friend Rita, she's got ya covered!

Photo Apps

#9 PicTapGo – Hands down my favorite phone photo editor due to the ability to mix and match filters plus having the capability of changing the filter's intensity too.

#10 Made With Studio – Add fun doodles, graphics, and text onto your images with then fun app. Warning: this one is a bit addictive once you get started!

#11 Diptic – Want to collage a few of your phone images together? This app will take care of that lickity split!

Storage and Sharing

#12 SmugMug – Easy to use interface for sharing photos with family members. Plus they can order prints directly from the album links when they're sent out. Bonus!

#13 Crashplan – My online life preserver. Crashplan uses wifi to automatically update files to the cloud as it runs quietly in the background of your computer.

#14 Animoto – Make your photos come to life with these slideshows set to music, animation and more.

#15 WordPress – Thanks to my WordPress blog I have a visual diary of my daughter's life from before she was born up to now.

Prints and Products

#16 Mpix – I'm always blown away by the quality and affordability of their prints and products. The color and clarity of my photos always looks amazing when I order here.

#17 CgProPrints – Quality pro canvas vendor that is affordable and open to anyone for orders. Enjoy this little know pro secret and get printing!

#18 Simply Galleries – These guys make it super simple to create and preview canvas wall clusters before you buy.

#19 Artifact Uprising – My favorite their linen bound, recycled paper, coffee table books. Brielle's baby book is one of these and I absolutely love the finished product.

Accessories

#20 Remote shutter release – Get in more photos with your kiddos with this handy dandy tool!

#21 Sunpak tripod – Another must have if one of your goals is to be in more photos instead of behind the lens all the time.

#22 Kelly Moore – Stylish and functional camera bags for moms who want to look good and carry it all while they're snapping. My current bag is the 2 Sues, but I've got my eye on the Beautiful Mess bag too.

#23 Vmjess – Customized cross body camera straps that are so much more comfy than the standard ones that come with the camera.

Gifts and Books

#24 Photojojo – A lot of fun and a little bit quirky, this is a photo lovers dream for fun photography related accessories.

#25 Click & Blossom – Bags, mugs, tees and more for photo loving mamas.

#26 Your Family in Pictures – The latest book from inspiring mom photographer Me Ra Koh. This is the third in a series of books for moms looking to document precious family moments.

#27 Elevate the Everyday – Another favorite book of mine for moms, written by another inspiring photo mom, Tracy Clark. This one is all about seeing your daily life with fresh eyes and capturing it more creatively.

What's else should be on this list?

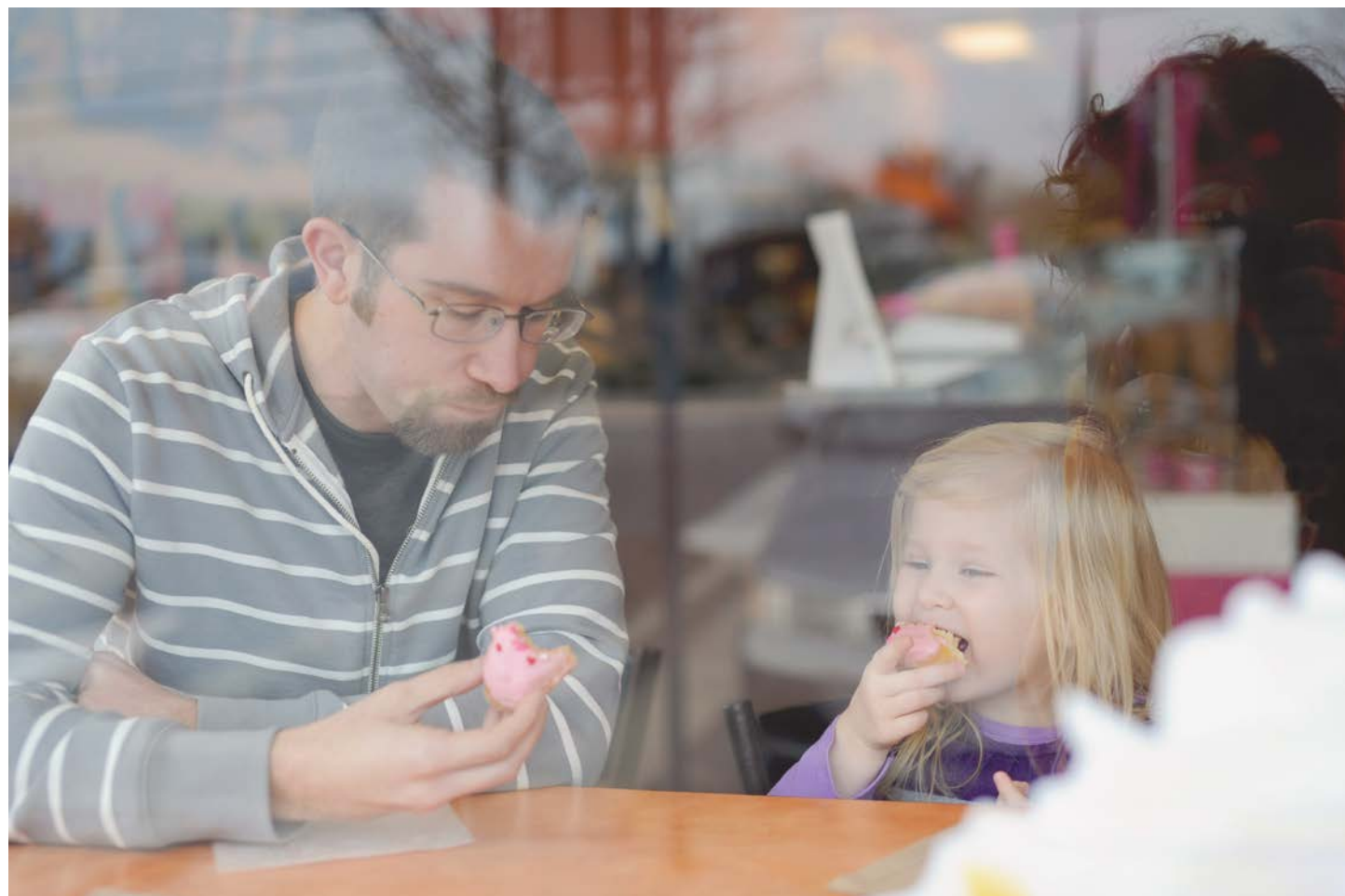
Have I missed anything? I would love to know your favorite photo sites or resources. You can reach me via social media or email below!



When on an outing set a 'photo timer' Keep the camera out no more than 20 minutes and then put it away to be present in the moment with your family too.

5 questions

EVERY MOM SHOULD ASK BEFORE BUYING A CAMERA



THE #1 EMAIL I GET TO MY INBOX IS USUALLY ASKING FOR MY RECOMMENDATIONS AND ADVICE WHEN YOU'RE READY TO MAKE THAT LEAP FROM COMPACT POINT AND SHOOT CAMERA TO A HEFTY AND POWERFUL DSLR.

Usually your question begins with something like this: I'm thinking about buying a DSLR camera but I have not idea where to start. What's better, Nikon or Canon?

My answer almost always steers moms away from looking solely at brand first, because really the difference between Nikon and Canon is like asking the difference between Apple and PC. It's truly a matter of personal taste and personal preference. Both of these brands (and others) get the job done, it's just the small differences in buttons and menu settings that make each brand unique.

Today, instead of focusing on camera brand or model first, I'm here to help you ask the REAL questions you should be asking before making the investment in a new camera.

These questions are here to serve both the momtographer looking to make the leap to DSLR owner for the first time OR the mama who is thinking it might be time for a DSLR upgrade.

QUESTION #1: WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION? If your internal dialogue is looking for a 'quick fix' you might want to re-think your purchase.

Are you simply looking to buy because all of your friends are rocking awesome photos using their DSLR camera too? Did you see Nikon release the brand new D7100 this week and you've decided you 'just have to have it'? Are you seeing all those beautiful images on Pinterest and figuring if you buy a DSLR yours will immediately look like that right away?

A DSLR camera will improve the quality of your photos a little bit all on it's own, but the real power lies in doing a bit of research into the right camera for you first, and then taking the initiative to learn about all the button and settings so you can truly gain the control and confidence required to use a DSLR well.

QUESTION 2: HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE I BOUGHT MY LAST CAMERA? Just like our computers and phones rapidly go out of date, our cameras can as well. DSLR cameras have a bit longer of a 'shelf life', but if you've been using the same camera for 4+ years and have been wondering if it's time for something new, it might be a good

time do some research on what's currently out there and make an upgrade!

QUESTION 3: HOW MUCH AM I WILLING TO SPEND?

Buying a DSLR is most certainly an investment. And the bigger and better the camera the more expensive it's going to be. It's easy to say 'your memories are worth the price' but keep in mind that you probably don't need the top of the line professional DSLR camera body to beautifully capture your life. In fact, there are days I regret my own DSLR purchase, and resent my top of the line camera—but that's a story for another day.

QUESTION 4: HAVE I MAXIMIZED MY POTENTIAL WITH THE CAMERA I ALREADY OWN?

If you have a full understanding of the technical in and outs of your current camera and still aren't able to adjust your settings to achieve the desired results, then you may have 'grown out' of your camera and could possibly benefit from an upgrade. When I was just starting out on my self-taught photography journey, I knew it was time to leave my point and shoot behind when I had a clear understanding of ISO, Aperture, and Shutter Speed but found that I could hardly adapt, change, or manipulate those settings at all. A few years later I knew it was time to upgrade my DSLR camera when I was seeking high ISO values with minimal noise, but didn't have those values available to me in my entry level DSLR.

QUESTION 5: IS A NEW CAMERA REALLY GOING TO FIX MY FRUSTRATIONS?

This is quite possibly the most important question of the five. Right now take a moment, grab a piece of paper, and write down what it is exactly that is frustrating you with your photos. Sometimes a new camera isn't always the answer. A lot of times a new lens (for current DSLR owners) can do the trick and is a lot less pricey. Sometimes a simple tweak in the time of day you take your photos is all you need to make a big impact in the quality of your images (i.e.: taking photos during the day instead of at night so you have ample light available).

If you're next thought is, "Ok Beryl, I'm ready to buy but I haven't a clue which camera is right for me?" Turn the page!

the mom's guide

TO BUYING A DSLR CAMERA



IF YOU'VE BEEN THINKING UPGRADING FROM A POINT AND SHOOT TO A DSLR OR EVEN UPGRADING YOUR CURRENT DSLR, LET'S DEMYSTIFY WHAT'S AVAILABLE ON THE MARKET TODAY SO YOU CAN MAKE AN EDUCATED PURCHASE DECISION.

For me, I've always known an upgrade was in order when I could tell that my knowledge exceeded my camera's abilities and I needed more control over my settings.

The range of cameras available to consumers these days is impressive. The good news is, entry level dslr cameras are at a price point accessible to most families

However, you also must keep in mind that more functionality and more bells and whistles usually comes with a higher price tag. You also need to be aware the too good to be true sales and wheeling and dealing that often happens online.

True story: One of my former Momtographie students bought her shiny new SLR on Ebay. She came to find out once it arrived that it was an overseas model and all of the menus were in Japanese and could not be changed to English. Yikes!!

I personally found it VERY helpful to go to my local camera shop, try out a few different models in person, see which felt right, and purchase locally. The prices were comparable to online prices, I got to know and support a local business, and I felt like I had really purchased the camera that was meant for me.

Before you go shopping ask yourself, "As a "Momtographer" what will I need my camera to do?"

Portraits of lazy days at home or vacations with the family? Sporting events and lots of action? Crisp tack sharp focus? Video functionality? Extra durability when those kiddos accidentally knock the camera off the table and on the floor?

As a mom my camera priority list looks a little like this:

- The camera must be easy and quick to be able to change settings on the fly (kids move a lot!),
- It must handle a quick shutter speed (to avoid blurry images).
- It needs to have low light sensitivity (so I can take good photos indoors with out my flash)
- It needs to have video capability built in so I only need one device to tote around.

If your budget is a bit higher, my current top performers

are the [Nikon d7100](#) or the [Canon 7D](#). Why? They both get glowing reviews for being able to handle low light situations. They both have a video feature built in, they are durable and weather resistant, and they have both has many many many focus points (great for tracking moving targets!).

However, I also realize these are the top of the line consumer DSLR cameras and are a steeper investment.

If you are looking to pinch some pennies, then the [Nikon d5200](#), [d3200](#) or the [Canon T4i](#) or [T3i](#) would be my second choice.

Also recently on the scene are the [Nikon 5300](#), [3300](#) or [Canon t5i](#) which are basically the newer models of the [cameras](#) listed above.

(If you want to research features or compare different models I HIGHLY recommend taking a peek at this site: [SnapSort](#).)

But, even more important than the camera are the lenses you will want to use after purchasing your new toy.

Lenses really are the star of the show.

A lot of times it is the lens that determines what your camera can handle. The lens can zoom or not zoom. The lens can tell the camera to be great in low light or not so great in low light. The lens is what allows the camera to create a tack sharp image or not. The lenses that come with these entry level SLRs are not always the most ideal for the Momtographer. They have minimal zoom capabilities, they don't produce the most sharp images, and their capabilities in low light stink.

My #1 must have Momtographer purchase to go along with your new shiny camera is the 35mm ([Canon here](#)) ([Nikon here](#)) or 50mm / f 1.8 lens ([Canon here](#)) ([Nikon here](#)). These lenses produce GORGEOUS images. They shine in low light. They are absolutely amazing lenses. And they are a rather affordable top performing lens option.

The one downfall is that those lenses aren't great for sports because they don't zoom. If zoom is what you need then I recommend investing in a 70-300mm zoom lens ([Canon here](#)) ([Nikon here](#)). That's the lens for you.

Is your head spinning yet?

I know there is a lot to think about when making this big investment. But, don't forget that once you've brought that camera home and you've started to play I'll be here ready to teach you what you need to know to really use that baby to its fullest potential.

why a DSLR camera

MAY NOT BE FOR YOU



DSLR CAMERAS, ALTHOUGH AMAZING, ARE OFTENTIMES WAY OVER-RATED WHEN IT COMES TO DOCUMENTING FAMILY MEMORIES. WANT TO KNOW WHY? HERE ARE FIVE REASONS.

“Wheeeeeee!!!” her high pitched squeals filled the air as we whiz around and around in dizzying circles. My three year old’s face instantly lit up like something out of those Magic of Disney commercials. You know the ones where the picture perfect family is nothing but smiles and childish delight as they race around and almost empty theme park waiting in a zero minute line to get on the classic Tea Cup ride.

For a split second we were that picture perfect family during our 2014 trip to Florida.

Little did anyone else know however, that just a few minutes prior we were waiting in 30 minute + lines with an over tired tantruming preschooler who desperately needed a nap, an over hungry husband who desperately need a snack, and an over anxious mama who was desperately longing to be anywhere but the tea cups because of her past history of vertigo after the ride.

All was forgotten however when we finally made it into our quaint purple spinning mug and heard the infectious laughter of our little girl as it twirled round and round.

I wished in that moment that my eyes were photographic lenses that could preserve this memory in vivid life like fashion. On this particular trip and I ::GASP:: chose to leave my big camera at home, and even if it was with me I knew a fancy DSLR didn’t belong anywhere near this ride.

I had my iPhone in my pocket, which amazingly helped keep me more focused on my daughter and less focused on the vertigo inducing spinning (a win win!)

For a split second I was bummed that I didn’t have a better way to capture our magical family experience, but quickly reminded myself that being present in this moment was so much better than capturing it stunningly.

Laughing with my husband and daughter = more meaningful than watching through a viewfinder. Setting my intention = knowing right now is a moment to be grateful for. Not every memorable moment = the need to be captured perfectly.

DSLR cameras although amazing, are oftentimes way over-rated when it comes to documenting family memories.

Want to know why? Here are five reasons for you:

1) SIZE DSLR cameras are big and bulky and can be a hassle to bring out and about on daily errands, family vacations, or or outings. Especially us mamas with littles ones who require a diaper bag filled to the brim with essentials. The DSLR is often one more thing that gets left behind.

2) EASE OF USE If you’ve never used a DSLR or learned about all the buttons and settings, there can be a pretty steep learning curve. It’s easy to get overwhelmed, stuck, or frustrated that pictures taken in AUTO mode don’t look professional straight out of the box. (However I’m happy to help get you unstuck with my [Momtographie Online](#) class if you need it!)

3) COST DSLR photography can be an expensive hobby. Once you learn a little bit about how ISOs, Apertures, and Shutter Speeds work you’ve entered a world of wanting newer fancier equipment. Lenses, camera bodies, tripods, remotes. The cost for these can really add up quickly!

4) SHAREABILITY DSLR images aren’t super easy to share to the interwebs just yet (but I bet that technology is coming). It’s so much easier to text a photo to grandma, or post on Facebook, or Instagram when you leave the DSLR behind and opt for a mobile phone instead.

5) DISTRACTABILITY A DSLR can be distracting to both you and your subject. When you hold the DSLR up in front of your face you automatically put a wall between you and your subject. This can really pull you out of being fully present in a special moment. On the flip side, the DSLR can be a real distraction to your subject as well, causing them to act less naturally then they might if you were toting something smaller.

Above all else, our job should be to capture our family memories as unobtrusively as possible, yes?

Less striving for the perfect shot, less worrying about what equipment to use, and more shooting from the heart with what is available to us at the time.

There's always tomorrow

A MOMTOGRAPHER'S MANTRA



SOMETIMES, WE MAMAS JUST NEED A LITTLE REASSURANCE THAT INDEED, TOMORROW IS ANOTHER DAY!

When you drop the camera in your bag intending to get it out for some photos, but you never do...

...there's always tomorrow.

When you race out of the house for groceries and then realized once you arrive that you forgot your wallet at home...

...there's always tomorrow.

When you begin your typically quiet morning with the dog tormenting the cats...

...there's always tomorrow.

When you need a drink, a huge, and friend, and an Advil all at once...

...there's always tomorrow.

When you have to physically remove your daughter from dance class in a full-on screaming tantrum...

...there's always tomorrow.

When your credit card unexpectedly reached its expiration and is embarrassingly declined in public...

...there's always tomorrow.

When you upload your latest photos and you realize they're all over-exposed...

...there's always tomorrow.

When your kids won't pose for the camera...

...there's always tomorrow.

When it's naptime on a hard mama day and you're crying in your mid-afternoon chai tea...

...there's always tomorrow.

When sleep is a distant memory and you're not sure when you'll get rest ever again...

...there's always tomorrow.

When you forget to take your daily 365 project photo...

...there's always tomorrow.

When the gas pump doesn't auto stop and spills gasoline all over the street and your feet...

...there's always tomorrow.

When you took the shots, but missed the moment...

...there's always tomorrow

6 tips

FOR PHOTOGRAPHING YOUR WHOLE FAMILY



WITH A BIT OF PLANNING AND PATIENCE WHOLE FAMILY PHOTO SESSIONS ARE POSSIBLE WITHOUT HIRING A PROFESSIONAL. HOWEVER, I RECOMMEND USING A FEW OF THESE TIPS FROM MY BAG OF TRICKS TO MAKE 'EM AS SUCCESSFUL AS POSSIBLE.

She may not be a delicate squishy newborn we've anxiously been waiting to meet for 9 impatient months.

However, Miss Penny has surely earned her way into our hearts in a very short period of time and is quickly becoming an integral member of the family.

Although I've made a conscious effort to document and photograph Brielle and Penny bonding, we hadn't had a chance to attempt an updated family photo between work schedules, school schedules, obedience trainings, errands, and everything else.

When I began my photography journey I used to dream about the money I would save by taking our own family photos. But as any mom will attest, this is easier said than done. By promoting ourselves to family photographer, we ultimately don't end up in any photos.

If we do try to arrange a family portrait session, the process is always much more complicated than we anticipate and takes much more time and energy than we expect, leaving the entire family grumpy and overwhelmed. Not the ideal feelings and emotions we want our portraits to convey.

But I was determined to do the hard work and get a few family photos (with the DSLR camera) of our 'growing' family. Our session from start to finished lasted about five minutes before the kid, dog, and husband started to getting annoyed.

I also sadly realized after the shoot was over that my ISO was set WAY to high (2000) and my Aperture was too low (f 2.8) to get everyone in focus in every shot. But I had to remind myself: even in a sea of photography mishaps that my perfectionist self would like to do over, we got a few winners as well.

We may never blow these images up huge and hang them on our walls, but these photos are the perfect snapshot of our family, our WHOLE family, today.

With a bit of prior planning and patience these whole family photo sessions are possible to achieve without hiring a professional. However, I recommend using a few of these tips from my bag of tricks to make 'em as successful as possible.

1) WORK IN A FAMILIAR SPACE Plan to take photos in a space that your family knows well. It will make your kids feel more at ease, and you'll already know what to expect from the light and exposure when you bring your camera into the mix.

2) ELIMINATE DISTRACTIONS If you're working inside try to keep toys, TV, games, etc...put away during photo time. If you decide to photograph outside choose a location away from the local playground.

3) HAVE THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT The right lens, tripod, and remote will make taking family photos a lot less stressful! For the room we worked in, I needed a wide angle lens at about 24mm to fit us all into the space the way I wanted. A tripod and remote allowed me to sit comfortably with my family instead of getting up and down to set a timer between shots.

4) PRACTICE FIRST It's so important to put some prior thought and practice into these photos. For our shoot I set up my camera on the tripod the night before our photos. In the morning I tested the light and used Brielle and Penny as stand-ins to check my focus and exposure before we got everyone else into the frame for the 'real deal.'

5) ACT NATURAL Think of things to say and do before you sit down to take photos. You don't have to all be looking at the camera for all the shots. Have a tickle fight, read a book together, or figure out who has the stinkiest feet. Whatever is fun for your family and keeps everyone calm and laughing is the best!

6) LET THE KIDS HELP Get the kids involved in helping you plan. Let them help you find the perfectly lit room, have them strike a pose while you set your exposure, or let them help you think of things to do or wear. They'll be more invested in being a part of the shoot if you make them a part of the planning process too.

BONUS TIP When in doubt there's always my bonus tip of BRIBERY. At the end of this shoot Brielle was rewarded with a piece of chocolate, the dog was rewarded with some yummy treats, and the husband was rewarded with some kid free time outdoors. Whatever works to get the shot, yes?

have a photo-rific adventure

3 STEPS TO A WELL-PLANNED SHOOT WITH YOUR KIDS



HOLIDAY-TIME AND PHOTO SHOOT-TIME CAN GO HAND-IN-HAND. HERE'S HOW BRIE AND I MADE THE MOST OF OUR SUMMER. USE THESE TIPS FOR UPCOMING HOLIDAYS, AND PHOTO-DOCUMENTING WILL BE A BREEZE!

The stricken look of panic that washed over my face as the neighbor confirmed news unknown to me right up to that very moment must have been quite amusing. “Can you believe there are only 18 days of preschool left?”

I did the math in my head and those 18 days only brought us to Memorial Day weekend. “That couldn’t be right,” I rationalized with myself, the public school has students in school until mid-June.

But the next day as I dropped the kiddo off at preschool and caught a glimpse at the calendar, it was confirmed. Summer vacation would begin earlier than I anticipated and I’d need to get myself in gear to be ready for having her home all summer long.

As a former teacher I never entered a classroom without a lesson plan, which is pretty much how I approach summer vacation with my munchkin at home now too.

I’ve gotta keep my classroom of one busy. She’s a bright, energetic, and independent little girl so having her help me develop a plan for how we’d like our summer to look makes vacation time fulfilling for us both.

Along with my need for a plan, I’ve broken down our planning process into three steps that ensure our activities are fun for the whole family and actually get completed!

I’d like to give you a glimpse of our process so that you can get to dreaming up your own photo-rific family adventures too!

Go grab a piece of paper, sit down with the kids, and let’s get to work!

STEP 1: MAKE AN ACTIVITY WISH LIST Some like to call it a bucket list, I prefer wish list because it’s easier for my child to understand. And frankly, sometimes we don’t get to every single item that we write down, so making them wishes feels more appropriate.

Take a quiet moment to sit with your child(ren) and dream up ideas for activities to do together. These could be field trips to take, activities to try, or recipes to make.

Choose things both you and your child will enjoy. One of our favorite things to do is surprise fro-yo dates. So simple, but it’s something special that we enjoy so it went on the

list. Simply brainstorm and write down any and all ideas on scrap paper for now, but if you’re feeling crafty or want to take your wish list a step further, find a special way to display your final list so you can check items off or remove them as they’re completed.

We narrowed our list down to our favorite 15 items because as we were planning for summer we discovered there were 15 weeks of summer vacation. This gave us one creative project per week. I would suggest planning no more than about three months in advance. More than that feels overwhelming given you’ll likely want to also squeeze in time for travel, playdates, school, running errands, etc...

STEP 2: SCHEDULE YOUR ADVENTURES Now that you have your wish list ideas planned out, let’s actually give them a specific time to be completed! You may or may not follow this schedule exactly. I know it can be tricky to map out months of activities, but grab a calendar and see if you can assign each activity to happen during a certain week.

For example, one of my wish list items was to take photos at a carnival. I know there is a specific week the carnival comes to our town every year so I’ll want to schedule that adventure for that week. Another activity like going to the farmer’s market or making homemade popsicles may get assigned to a more ‘relaxed’ week when I know we won’t have to much going.

I like to keep our family calendars and schedules online in [Google Calendar](#), because I have access to them everywhere. If you haven’t tried it, I highly recommend you check it out!

Another reason I love assigning our wish list adventures to a specific time frame is because I have an instant reminder to search or shop for supplies or groceries I may need to collect or purchase for a particular activity.

STEP 3: DEFINE YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY GOALS Sometimes, we can feel like we’ve lost our sense of self or purpose in the throes of full time mommyland.

To combat this I allow myself to take pictures. The camera allows me to embrace my hobby while my child embraces hers.

By defining some concrete photography goals I’m giving myself even more of a reason to actually pick up my DSLR camera more often and carry it with me.

I would stick to three main photo goals so you don’t get

overwhelmed. Here were my three goals for our summer:

- Consciously make an effort to be in more photos WITH my daughter
- Due to a later bedtime, I'd like to actually play with photographing my daughter in the golden hour of backlight.
- Start a photo project. I'm not ready to commit to a full 365 day project right now, but something that's weekly or less of a commitment may be more appropriate.

Other goals you may want to consider for your own photography growth:

- shoot in manual mode full time,
- practice during the mid day sun,
- work on authentic real-life storytelling images,
- organize and print photos for albums or wall hangings,
- find new photo shooting locations,
- practice creative composition,
- posing etc...



Be sure to pass off the camera to someone else every now and then so you can be in some of the pictures too.

your must-capture moments

MADE EASY



EVER WONDERED HOW TO CAPTURE PHOTO-WORTHY MOMENTS AT YOUR CHILD'S BIRTHDAY PARTY? OR THE BEACH? A LAZY DAY OUTING TO THE PARK? RAINY DAY INDOOR PLAY TIME? YOUR NEXT FAMILY GATHERING? KEEP ON READING!

During my four years of teaching Momtographie I've been asked frequently about the best way to capture certain photo worthy moments. Below is a list of some of these moments I am always asked about, the top tip I've deemed to be the most important to focus on during each one, and a top 10 shot list you can keep with you next time you're in one of these situations.

BIRTHDAY PARTY



TOP TIP: Focus on intention and ask for help.

Photographing children on their big day is probably the top scenario I am asked about. I jokingly reply, "Hire a professional" because it's REALLY hard to be hostess, mom, and photographer during party time. Set your intention before a party to allow yourself to take quick snap shots or allow yourself to be ok with entrusting friends and relatives with the camera so they can help document the event too.

SUGGESTED TOP 10 SHOT LIST

1. Portraits of the bday child
2. Mom and dad with bday child
3. The cake
4. The presents
5. The favors
6. Balloons on mailbox
7. Friends doing a party activity
8. Blowing out candles
9. Opening presents
10. Party wrap up/exhausted tired faces

THE BEACH



TOP TIP: Find balance: Pre-plan, shoot, and stop.

Nothing ruins a vacation faster than you being behind the lens the entire time! It's important for you to pre-plan a shot list of must have images and then set aside a time limit for taking them. Allow yourself 10 minutes to shoot and then put the camera away so you can present with your family. Moments will always be missed by our lens and you will run into the perfect photo op at a time where you don't have your camera out. But, remind yourself that life is so much sweeter if you can actually be present in some of these moments instead of documenting them around the clock.

SUGGESTED TOP 10 SHOT LIST

1. Toes in the sand
2. Wide shot of the beach
3. Sunrise or Sunset
4. Sitting in the water
5. Beach umbrella
6. Beach toys
7. Eating on the dock/pier/boardwalk
8. Splashing in waves
9. Collecting seashells
10. Holding hands with mommy/daddy/grandparents etc....

THE PARK

**TOP TIP: Play with your kids**

Take a trip to the park as an opportunity to run around with your kids! You'll be able to vary your shots so much more and inspire natural expressions better if you interact with them while working the camera. Make your next trip to the park as much of a workout for you as it is for your kiddos and you'll have a variety of photos that will make you all smile every time you look back at them.

SUGGESTED TOP 10 SHOT LIST:

1. Walking towards the playground
2. Going down the slide
3. Swinging on the swings
4. Enjoying a snack or picnic lunch
5. Sitting/laying in the grass
6. Collecting rocks/sticks/bugs/etc...
7. Your child's shoes
8. Climbing up the play equipment
9. Laughing with friends
10. Hanging on the monkey bars

INDOOR PLAY TIME

**TOP TIP: Look for light first**

So many times I get asked how to take photos in a dark dimly lit playroom and my best way to combat this one is by moving playtime somewhere else! The most important element to getting crisp clear photos inside our homes is light. Move your kiddos (and their toys, games, books, etc...) into a well-lit room or next to a window. In the end, it isn't really about the room you are in but about capturing your kids and the fun they're having.

SUGGESTED TOP 10 SHOT LIST

1. Imagination with a favorite toy
2. Putting together a puzzle
3. Playing a board game
4. Tech time – Tablets, phones, etc...
5. Snuggling with stuffed animals or baby dolls
6. Racing cars, trains, animals
7. Dressing up in costume
8. Coloring or art
9. Helping with a cooking or baking project
10. Snuggle time with mom or dad

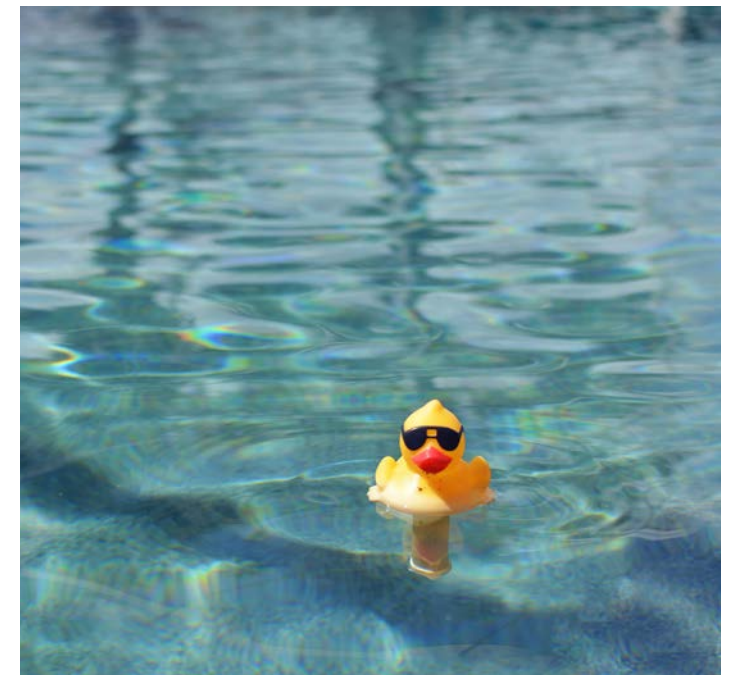
FAMILY GATHERINGS

**TOP TIP: Tell a story**

I don't know about you but the rest of my family isn't the keenest about family photos. If you can make family time photos more about telling a story and less about smiling to say cheese the better it will go. Pretend you are an editorial photographer who is there to capture candid moments as they unfold. Make it your priority to include each person in a photo and the details of your gathering as well. Once the fun is over and you compile the story into a beautiful photo book your family will see the value, making the process of documenting family memories so much easier next time around.

SUGGESTED TOP 10 SHOT LIST

1. Portraits of every family member
2. The house or location where the gathering is happening
3. The grill, firepit, etc...
4. The table decor or buffet area
5. Chowing down together
6. Playing horseshoes/ball/golf/frisbee
7. Kids riding bikes, playing with sidewalk chalk, running around in the yard
8. Glasses with drinks in hand
9. Candid laughter
10. Candid hugs or kisses between family members



the unconventional mom's guide

TO MASTERING MANUAL MODE



IT'S TIME TO "STOP GROWING" BY REVIEWING EIGHT NON-TECHNICAL PHOTOGRAPHY SKILLS YOU SHOULD WORK ON MASTERING BEFORE EVEN ATTEMPTING TO TACKLE THE EXPOSURE TRIANGLE AND MANUAL MODE.

Each evening as we begin our regular bedtime rituals... bath time, brushing teeth, PJs on, read two stories...I tell my almost 4 year old two words that I have been taking to heart lately. "Stop Growing"

She giggles and smiles and cups her hands around my cheeks and says, "You're silly mommy."

And she's right. It's silly for me to tell her to stop doing something she can't control. But, as Brielle turns 4, it's never been more apparent that she's no longer baby or toddler.

She's finally too heavy for me to carry, she starts lengthy conversations about deep topics I'm not quite ready for, and she even went to her first 'prom'!!!!

So right now I'm trying really hard not to push her forward and simply filling in our free time with snuggles, bear hugs, and imaginative play. Because those are the things that remind me that she is still little and isn't growing as fast as I think.

I used to long for all of the early milestones to whiz by. I wanted to see her take charge of her own independence by talking, walking, going potty, using utensils, etc...

But now I want nothing more than to slow it all down.

How does this story translate into an unconventional photography lesson? Today I want you to stop growing. To set an intention to stop rushing your photographic learning.

I want you to make the desire to slow down your photography journey just as important as your desire to slow down your child's life.

We all want to rush ahead to mastering the technical 'stuff,' but by getting there too quickly we realize we missed out on some super important early milestones that can stall our growth and progress if we don't stop to soak them all in. Here are the eight skills you need to master first before mastering manual:

1) LIGHT Moms are amazed at how focusing their energies on this ONE single little ingredient can make a huge impact in their images. Want help 'finding the light' in your photography? I've got you covered [here](#).

2) LOCATION I may or may not be known for spot cleaning my house before taking pictures. Meaning I throw all the

toys and clutter onto one side of the room so that the side where I'm taking photos is clean and clear. It gives the illusion that I'm on top of my housework and organized when in reality that's the farthest thing from the truth.

3) TEXTURE How can you make your photo backdrops interesting? Can you coordinate outfits with your child's toys or the room they are playing in? Is there a park with long grass, trees, or flowers that you can use as a backdrop? What can you do to make your photos pop more and come to life?

4) SCHEDULING The beauty of digital photography is that we have permission to make mistakes! I only keep about 20% of the photos I take. It's important to schedule time to take photos where you're 100% OK with failing. Those 'bad' photos will teach you SO MUCH about what you can do next time when you're in a 'must get good a photo' type of situation.

5) PLAY The more FUN you have while photographing, the better. Period. Find a new art project to try, game to play, or activity to enjoy. While you're at it, pick up the camera and snap a few images while you enjoy quality time together.

6) FOCUS That little red light that lights up inside your camera when you push the shutter button down holds a lot more power than you realize! If you've ever had a photo where your kids end up a total blur but the trees and plants and everything else around them is in crisp clear focus then you need to give [this article](#) about focus points a read.

7) CHIMPING I used to be a click and go photographer, never taking the time to review photos 'til I arrived home after a session. BAD IDEA! I'd be deflated if none of the photos turned out right. I now know to 'chimp,' which is just a fancy pro term for 'checking your playback screen' as you shoot. I test out settings and light, take a few shots, and then peek at them and make adjustments to my settings as needed.

8) MINDSET I was asked recently when I felt less like an amateur and more like pro with my photography, and what helped me get to that place. There was never one technical skill that brought me to a place of feeling more 'pro.' It was my confidence in myself and my abilities that brought me to a place of feeling my photos were good enough. I had to do the inner work and from there everything else fell into place.

6 simple projects

TO IMPROVE YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY



HERE ARE FIVE CREATIVE PHOTO PROJECTS TO TARGET THOSE PLACES WHERE YOU'RE STRUGGLING. DESIGNED FOR THE BEGINNER AND MORE ADVANCED USER ALIKE, THEY'LL GET YOU EXCITED TO SHOOT AND PRACTICE THE SKILLS YOU'RE LACKING.

At some point during your photo journey you're bound to hit a wall of frustration. With each new skill you learn about taking better photos comes a different set of rules, buttons, and settings to remember. This compounded with new locations and unpredictable light can become quite challenging to a mom on the go with her kids.

During these times you may feel like giving up on your learning, desiring to switch back to AUTO mode full time, or revert to taking cell phone snapshots because it feels so much easier.

You'll tell yourself that picking and choosing settings is too hard, you're not cut out to master technical photography, and you'll beat yourself up over every over exposed or under exposed photo in stead of celebrating that one AMAZING one you say was a fluke because you nailed it at just the right time.

When you have these moments however, I'm here to tell you not to give up.

I know that it's this exact point on your learning journey to continue moving forward. Those moments of most resistance are the ones where we're about to make our greatest gains. And we do that by pushing ourselves to make practicing the places where we're struggling a priority.



**IF YOU ARE HAVING TROUBLE WITH LIGHT
TRY: TIME & LOCATION CHALLENGE**

Pick a time of day where you know you struggle or are

inspired to improve. This could be mid day sun (especially on those cloudy days where the sun and clouds like to play peek-a-boo), The golden hour, or even after dark indoors. For one whole month you are going to get out your camera at the exact same time in the exact same location. By focusing on where you're struggling with light you'll make that scenario a priority and will ultimately improve.



**IF YOU FEEL LIKE EVERY PHOTO YOU TAKE IS BLURRY
TRY: TARGET PRACTICE**

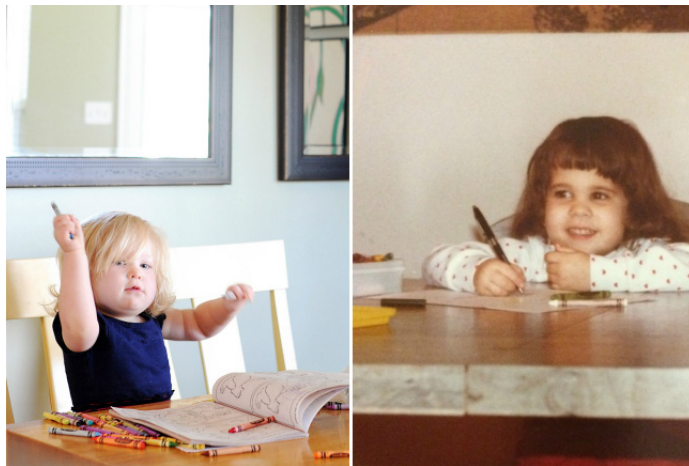
In my Momtographie classes we talk a lot about switching the camera's focus points into 'single point focus' mode. If you have not yet switched your camera to it, I've got a tutorial for you [HERE](#). Once you've got that going, we're going to set up situations where your kids are moving (that shouldn't be too hard. right?) where you can practice.

Spend four days or weeks in a row going to the playground, running around in the backyard, or bringing your camera to the kids soccer practice and practicing in single point focus mode.



**IF YOU ARE LUSTING AFTER NEW EQUIPMENT
INSTEAD OF EMBRACING WHAT YOU ALREADY HAVE
TRY: PROJECT 50**

Unlike a project 52 (where you take photos every week of the year) this project is all about only using one lens consistently and creatively. So you could use your 50mm for 50 days, or your 35mm for 35 days, or your 85mm for 85 days. The best part of this one is simplicity. One lens, one photo a day.



**IF YOU ARE BORED AND NEED A CREATIVE PUSH
TRY: HIGHLIGHT REEL**

Take a few moments to run through your childhood photos in your mind. Or pull out an old album and take a feel. Find a memory or a series of photographs that speak to your heart that you'd like to recreate in a photograph in

some way. Then get going with brainstorming how to make that happen. To make this project even more special, have your kids step in as the 'actors' for this shoot and create a generational gift that is sure to make your entire family smile.



**IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM WITH PERFECTIONISM AND
CELEBRATING YOUR SUCCESSES
TRY: FROM THE HIP**

This is one of my favorites because the results are sometimes surprising. During this project you are not allowed to look through your viewfinder. Your camera is held at hip level, finger on the shutter, and you simply shoot (you are allowed to set a technical settings such as ISO, aperture, and Shutter Speed before you begin). The perspective, light, and focus in these are always so unique and some of my favorite shots are taken in this way. I often surprise myself thinking nothing will turn out, but something always does.

**IF YOU AREN'T PULLING OUT THE CAMERA
CONSISTENTLY
TRY: ONE INGREDIENT FIX**

If you're just not sure where to start, or you need a spark of inspiration to get yourself going, why not sign up for my free week-long One Ingredient Fix? I'll be your accountability buddy and guide as we explore the one ingredient I've found that will make an immediate impact in your photo results. I promise that in seven days you'll see your photos go from frustrating to fabulous. Go [here](#) to sign up and be notified when it returns.



Let them do a 'forbidden' activity like jumping on the bed and watch the mischievous smiles naturally appear!

20 conversation starters

FOR TAKING BETTER PHOTOS OF KIDS



NINE TIMES OUT OF TEN MOMS COME TO MOMTOGRAPHIE CLASSES FRUSTRATED THAT THEIR KIDS HATE GETTING THEIR PHOTOS TAKEN, THAT THEY WON'T LOOK AT THE CAMERA, AND THAT THEY RUN THE OTHER WAY RESULTING IN A BLURRY MESS.

I know how frustrating this can be, and I want to issue a challenge to you that may change the way you think of taking photos of your child—and get better results for both of you!

I don't think this is actually about your kids hating photography. It's about them hating having to disengage from what they love to do (playing, running, moving) and actually sit still for you.

A few weeks ago I needed photos for a blog post I was working on. It was getting down to the wire to get photos snapped so one morning I said to my daughter, "Let's go take some pictures together right now."

"NO!" she adamantly barked back.

Frustrated and ready to give up I took a peek outside and saw a break in some early morning rain clouds that left several puddles on our street.

"Ok, so you don't want to take photos, let's go put on your rain boots and jump in rain puddles instead."

"OK!" she squealed.

I told her that if I let her jump in puddles she had to let me bring the camera, and she agreed. My daughter became much more agreeable when she knew she was about to play, use her imagination, and have fun.

When we can make photo taking more about the kids and meeting their needs and less about getting a perfect shot, that's where the magic will happen and your beautiful photos will begin falling into place with less effort.

Because really, all your kids want and need is to be filled with opportunities to play and connect with YOU. When we can engage them in conversation, fun, and play that's when they'll forget the camera even exists.

Use the tips below to start talking and connecting. Allow these conversation and activity starters simply open up the opportunity for discussion to continue to flow. Be sure to bring the camera along so when the perfect moment arises all you have to do is point and click.

20 CONVERSATION STARTER PHOTO IDEAS FOR KIDS

Ask About Their Day

- Who did you play with at school?
- What toys did you use?
- Where did we visit?
- Should we eat _____(insert best thing ever here) for breakfast/lunch/dinner?

Incite Their Imagination

- I heard there's a magical creature living in mommy's lens. What is it?
- What should we pretend to be today? (superhero, princess, doctor, chef, teacher, etc...)
- Let's go explore where the garden monsters/fairies/gnomes/bugs live!
- Did any of the creatures/monsters/fairies/etc... crawl inside mommy's camera? Can you see them in there?

Play A Game

- Simon Says
- Red Light, Green Light
- Staring Contest (Into the Lens!)
- Quiet Game
- I Spy
- Hopscotch

Do Something Unexpected and Silly

- Bust out in song
- Have a dance party
- Bring out the tickle monster
- Make funny noises
- Tell a joke

Happy snapping!

reconnecting

THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY



HERE'S A LITTLE 'RETURN TO HAPPY' PHOTO EXERCISE THAT WILL HAVE YOU AND YOUR KIDS CONNECTING AND SMILING AGAIN, EVEN ON THE HARDEST PARENTING DAYS.

"Mommy are you happy?" We've just finished another time out (there have been so many today that I think I've lost count), and I sit on her bed to talk about her latest slip up and her slender 3 year old fingers pull my face close to hers wrinkling noses as they touch. She looks me in the eyes and I can see her concern for my well being.

My heart sinks realizing there have been too many miscommunications, too many raised voices, and too many silent treatments today.

She knows it.

I'm at the end of my rope and there is nothing to mask the frustration, exhaustion, and anger that comes from wishing she had better behavior already. But I know deep down that it's just a phase and this too shall pass.

This one question, "Are you happy?" brings up guilt and worry that after all the tantrums, talking back, and screaming my baby is feeling the weight of responsibility for my level of happiness. And she knows that today she's missing the mark.

I want her to realize that she is never responsible for my happiness, she ALWAYS makes me happy even when her behavior does not, and there is always time for a reset back to 'happy' when we go off course.

Here's a little 'Return To Happy' photo exercise that will have you and your kids connecting and smiling again, even on the hardest parenting days.

1) BRAINSTORM Start by making a 'happy list' with your child. You write down five things that make you happy, and have them do the same. Here's what my daughter Brielle and I came up with:

- Mom: Brielle's contagious belly laugh, warmer days, wagging tails, morning cups of coffee, freshly washed laundry
- Brielle : hugs, kisses, playing games like Jenga, stuffed animals, coloring with Mommy

2) PHOTOGRAPH Grab a camera and photograph your interpretation of the lists. Allow your child to be in charge of the camera, help compose, or simply play! I thought Brielle



would want to be the photographer, but once she started up with one of her happy list items she didn't want to stop so I snapped the photos of her instead.

3) CONNECT Sit down together after you're done to review and connect over the photos. You may not be able to photograph every item in one sitting and that's ok. Resolve to come back to your lists the next day to find and photograph some more!

4) DISPLAY Once you complete a set of photos print them out (on your home printer paper is totally fine!) and find a fun way to display them. Create a photo collage with construction paper and glue, make your own popsicle stick photo frames, or use peel and stick magnets to hang them on the fridge.

It's so important that we show our kids that happiness is a choice, that we are in full control of our emotions, and with a little bit of photographic evidence we can always return to 'happy' even on our most difficult days.

turn a photo scavenger hunt

INTO A LEARNING OPPORTUNITY



THE PHOTO SCAVENGER HUNT IS THE PERFECT WAY TO INVOLVE THE WHOLE FAMILY IN A FUN, SIMPLE, MESS FREE PROJECT THAT CAN BE ADAPTED AND TWEAKED IN SO MANY WAYS TO FIT THE AGES OF YOUR KIDS AND THEIR LEARNING GOALS.

In my previous life, before becoming a 'photography coach for moms' I was a public school teacher for 10 years. I spent three of those years in classrooms with Kindergarten and First graders and then spent another seven years as a technology specialist for both students and staff.

In my final year working in a school, my favorite days were Mondays.

Mondays were photography club days. Ten bright eyed 5th graders would show up at my computer lab door after the school day was over for an hour of authentic learning and fun using a camera and editing software.

During the course of eight weeks we gained self-confidence through shooting selfies, discussed light and movement and the science behind how a camera works, expressed creativity in photo stories, editing, and transformation, and we took scavenger hunts that tied in directly with classroom learning objectives.

The one thing I learned from the kids in my photography club was that it didn't matter what the activity was that we did together, the camera was enough to keep them engaged in learning after a long school day.

The immediate visual feedback given from digital photography was a huge motivator and I saw them light up each time a new image showed itself on the camera's playback screen.

The photo scavenger hunt is the perfect way to involve the whole family in a fun, simple, mess free project that can be adapted and tweaked in so many ways to fit the ages of your kids and their learning goals.

I am going to walk you through how to define the objective of your scavenger hunt project and encourage you to get started. Then we'll look at some ideas and tutorials to get your photo scavenger hunt images off the camera and printed in a way that brings the learning full circle.

Ready?

1) CHOOSE A LEARNING OBJECTIVE What would be the most fun and developmentally appropriate thing to hunt for with a camera? Is there a theme you'd like to embrace? Do you want to photograph the ABCs? Colors? Numbers?

Shapes? Farm Animals? Historic Landmarks in your city? Foods? Rhyming Words? Opposites? Feel free to get creative with your hunt depending on the age and needs of your child.

Bonus points if you can make up a really creative story with you kids for WHY you need to go on this scavenger hunt.

Example: "We need to make an ABC book for your little sister so she can start learning her letters. Would you like to help me take pictures to fill her book?"

2) CREATE A SHOT LIST Once you have chosen your objective, it's time to sit with your child(ren) and brainstorm a list of possible photos you could take that fit your theme. If you are doing this project yourself to create something for a very young child, then take some solo time to make your own list. You may not find every photo you brainstorm and you might break away from this list if you find something else more compelling on your adventures but a list at least gives you a place to start.

I suggest starting with 25 items on your list. Bonus points if you have more than 25 items!

3) FIND TIME TO SHOOT With a 25 item list you likely won't finish your project in one session. Break your project into pieces to make it more manageable. If you are doing this project with your kids and giving them a chance to snap the photos, perhaps set aside time to find five items on the list per day. If you choose a project that involves more field trips to historic places or take more of a time investment perhaps you can try to go to one location or on one field trip per week.

4) SNAP (HIGH QUALITY) IMAGES Since we're really trying to make this project into a special (and authentic) learning opportunity where we'll print and share the photos when done, I highly recommend learning a bit about your camera and technical photography to get the best images possible. The fastest way you can do this is by seeking out good light. A camera is essentially a big light box and the more light you have available the faster your camera can click and the brighter your images will pop.

Turn off the flash and search for good natural light. If you're taking photos indoors look for the rooms in your home that are well lit. This will change throughout the day as the sun moves. I take most of my photos in my foyer and dining room areas because the light in the afternoon is fantastic. Outdoors, especially when taking photos of your kids, you'll want to be

sure that YOU are looking into the sun as you take the photo. What this does is ensure that you eliminate harsh highlights and shadows from faces and will all help keep your subjects from having squinty eyes too.

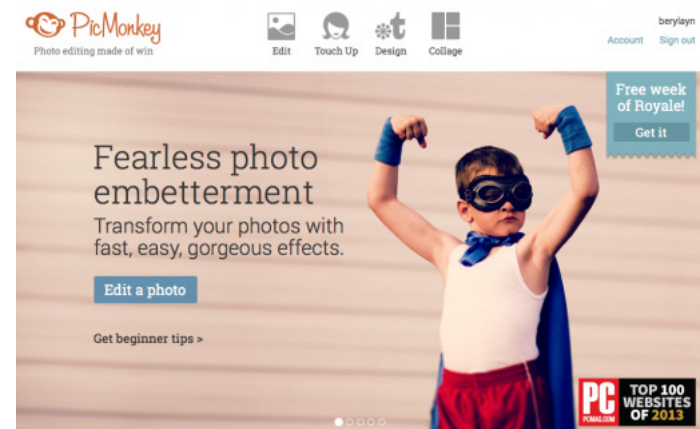
The true magic happens in what you do with those photos once they're taken.

The way we truly make learning authentic for our kids is by tying an activity into a project with a purpose. Which is exactly what we're going to talk about next.

If you haven't yet chosen a project, I encourage you to start here. Once you've got those photos and are ready for the next steps, here are some of my favorite ways take it to the next level and showcase your photos once you're done.

5) TRANSFORM THEM INTO SOMETHING NEW |

I absolutely LOVE teaching my adult photography students how to edit using the online based website PicMonkey.com. With many free features (and many more that unlock for a low annual fee) it's my go to resource for moms looking to start off their photo editing easily.



But what amazes me even more is the way kids use this program when given the chance. PicMonkey not only allow for photo editing, but has several other creative graphic design uses as well. I've watch kids turn photos into comics, storyboard collages, and masterful art pieces.

It's also my favorite starting place for my next project idea.

6) DESIGN FLASH CARDS Although I realize that flash cards are not always the best mode of teaching, I do feel that they serve value and purpose when used effectively, sparingly, and intentionally (for learning letter, sounds, or sight words for example).

Allowing your kids to design flash cards for themselves or for a younger sibling is also a powerful project. It's less about the flash cards and more about the process your child goes through to create them.

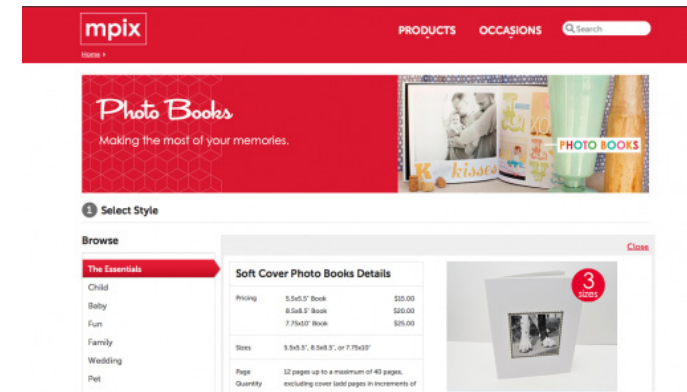
If your children are old enough allow them to make the cards with your help, or you can DIY if you're making them for a younger child. Start in PicMonkey with editing (due to the place where I plan to print, I crop the photos to square) and add any relevant text overlays on top of their image.



For our ABC card set I plan to get a set of square prints done at Artifact Uprising. The option to sent 25 different prints on recycled card stock is appealing to me and is the perfect number to cover each letter of the alphabet.

7) CREATE A BOOK If flash cards just aren't your thing, think of ways you can create a themed book with your photos. Colors, farm animals, historic landmarks, etc...

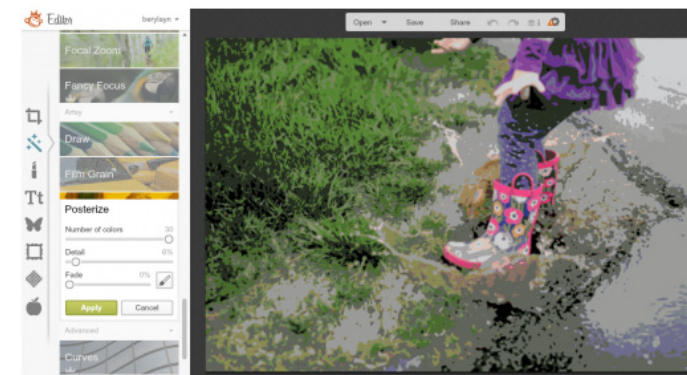
You can start in PicMonkey and do photo editing if you wish.



However if that is too time consuming or you just don't want to take that time, you can start the book design process right away. Mpix.com does great quality work, is reasonable prices, has both hard cover and soft cover options, and is super easy to navigate and create with.

8) WRITE A STORY For those of you with older children, you could see if they can write a story to go along with their photographs. Encourage them to use photos as illustrations for a book or let a single photo inspire an entire writing piece.

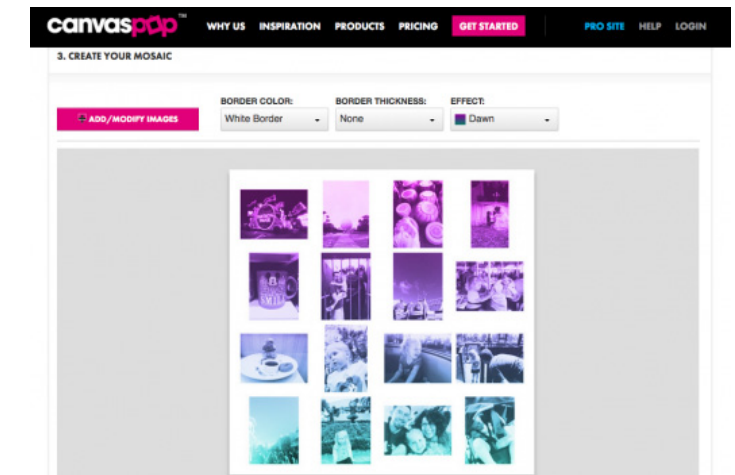
One editing technique I LOVE to encourage when children want to create photo illustrations is the Posterize effect in PicMonkey. It makes photos look like a painting so they ultimately appear to be a book illustration.



You can then take those illustrative photos and words and create a soft cover 'children's book' using Mpix.com.

9) HANG THEM ON THE WALL If your photo scavenger hunt involved some sort of theme or family trip or outing you might want to hang the results on a wall somewhere in a special collage type of display.

Canvas pop is another resource that makes this easy and fun for you and/or your kids to create. Their photo collages are simple to use and their photo mosaics allow you to easily import photos from Instagram if that's where they're housed.

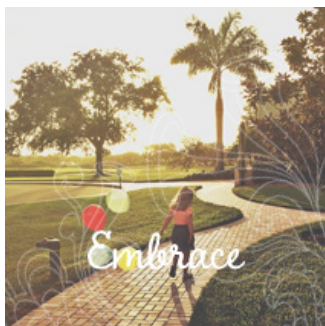


For the more budget conscious, you can still create awesome photo collages in PicMonkey.com and then print them on a home printer to hang on the wall or the fridge.

I hope these ideas get your wheels turning and help you and your kids learn to love photography as much as I do.

If you enjoyed this issue of Compose

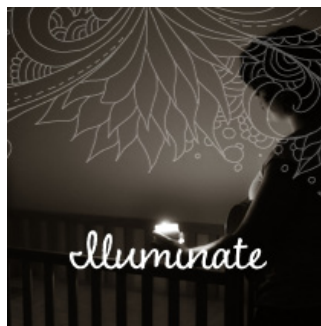
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