

Baby photography 101

You don't need to be a professional to get a great snapshot of baby. BY LISA EVANS

Snapping picture-perfect images of your new bundle of joy can be daunting. After all, babies are unpredictable and haven't yet learned the art of striking a pose. While hiring a professional photographer to capture all the adorable stages in your little one's life may seem the most obvious solution, these snapshots can cost upwards of a couple of hundred dollars per session.

Gosia Dixon, owner of Sugar Plum Photography, specializes in newborn photography and says anyone can capture a great image of their baby by following these five easy steps:

GET DOWN TO YOUR BABY'S LEVEL.

The key to taking natural photos is to position yourself at your baby's eye level. Lying on the floor next to your baby, rather than shooting from above will give the impression that you've entered the baby's world. "A lot of parents take pictures when they're standing and the baby's looking up, but it's a lot prettier if you get down to their level and get up close and personal," says Gosia.

USE NATURAL LIGHTING. Avoid using flash, if possible. The flash can disturb baby's eyes (or wake them up) and the harsh light ruins the gentle atmosphere you're trying to create.

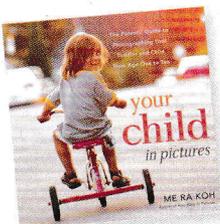
To get the best lighting, take photos in a room with a large window to take advantage of natural light. The best times of day to snap away using natural light are when it's cloudy or overcast, early in the day or at sunset. Taking photos at noon when lighting is harsh creates a lot of shadows.

KEEP IT SIMPLE. Dressing babies in tiaras and frills, or surrounding them with mountains of toys creates clutter in an image. Avoid going overboard with props. "Babies are so cute naturally. They don't need much to dress them up," says Gosia. Instead, pick one meaningful prop, such as a favourite teddy bear. When taking photos of Baby wrapped in a blanket or lying on a pillow, avoid choosing one with very bold patterns. "It really brings out the baby's natural cuteness in the photos when backgrounds are simple."

AVOID BASKETS AND BUCKETS. The Anne Geddes' style photos of babies in baskets and buckets are adorable, but Gosia says creating these types of images can be dangerous for inexperienced photographers. "I can't stress enough how quickly babies fall out of poses. You're behind the camera and you may be a couple of feet in front of the baby. Your reaction

time from when you realize the baby's about to fall to when you get there will be too short," she says.

IDENTIFY HAPPY TIMES. Trying to take photos when baby is fussy and unhappy won't result in the beautiful images you want to adorn your walls with. Find moments in your daily routine when your baby is most content. Gosia recommends whipping out the camera right after a feeding or when baby is fresh from a nap to capture their wide-open eyes and maybe even a giggle. Make sure the space you're photographing in is comfortable, neither too warm nor too cold as babies are more likely to act cute when they're comfortable. Remember, babies have short attention spans. If they start fussing, that means it's time to stop. If they're in a bad mood, or not cooperating, just try again another time. ○



Check out **Your Child in Pictures** by Me Ra Koh for more child photography tips. \$23, at book retailers.

Keep on top of baby's milestones at ParentsCanada.com/baby.

HOW TO FIND A PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER

Still not getting the photos you want? If you choose to go the professional route, Gosia Dixon provides some tips on how to select a baby photographer.

→ Ask to see their portfolio. While flipping through the images, ask yourself whether you like the photographer's props and their photographic style. Examine the photos for signs the babies are stressed. If they have purple hands or feet that's a sign that they're not getting the circulation in their toes or fingers which could mean an incorrect pose or they've been left there for too long.

→ Ask about experience. A photographer may have years of experience shooting weddings, but no experience photographing newborns. Ask your photog if they are a member of any associations. National accredited child photographers may charge more, but an accreditation will show you that they're experienced in this field.

→ Ask for references. A good photographer should be more than willing to give referrals. Contact a couple of their references and talk about their experience. Ask about their overall impression of the photographer, how the photographer handled situations when the baby was being fussy and uncooperative, how soon they received the photos, whether they were pleased with the quality of the images.

→ Get the right vibe. When speaking with your potential photographer for the first time, ask yourself how you feel when you're talking to them. If you're not feeling comfortable on the phone, you won't feel comfortable during the shoot. It's like dating. You may have to go through a few to find one that's the right fit for your family.