

FINDING MAGIC IN THE CHAOS

5 Tips for Stress Free Family Photos



BY Jessica Jeremiah

Welcome!

I'M JESSICA



As a mom of two and a photographer for over a decade, I know firsthand how stressful family photo sessions can feel. I also know this to be true: I've never once regretted taking the time to preserve my family as they were *right then*. These seasons are incredibly fleeting, even when they're loud, chaotic, and far from picture-perfect. Some of my favorite photos were taken during what felt like total mayhem, like the session where my then three-year-old repeatedly ripped out her bow, squirmed and squealed like a piglet... and eventually peed on me. Five years later? It's one of our funniest stories.

I created this guide using tips I've learned through years of experience, both behind the camera and as a parent. My hope is that it helps you feel more at ease, more present, and ready to embrace the moments as they unfold.

Family photos don't have to be perfect to be meaningful. Yes, a little preparation goes a long way, but the most special images are the ones that show emotion and connection!

1. Control the Controllables

The reality is, moms are generally the one coordinating all the details for family photos. Delegate what you can, and think ahead to make sure you aren't rushing around and stressed last minute. Prepare and try on outfits ahead of time to make sure there aren't any unanticipated wardrobe fit issues! Steam/iron the night before if necessary, and lay out everything you might need so it's ready to go (or even in the car already!)

Consider dressing little ones at the location to prevent wrinkles, spit up/ drool stains, etc on the way over. I've totally had a toddler who just switched to a forward facing car seat get car sick just as they were pulling into our location- we had to reschedule since the only back up clothes available were neon!

If you want to be extra prepared, having a simple and neutral back up outfit for little ones is a great option just in case!



2. Give Yourself Enough Time

One of the most important factors for a session going smoothly is relaxed and happy parents. You set the tone for everyone! If you're frustrated trying to get everyone in the car, and driving like a maniac trying to get there on time, I can promise you, it'll be harder to get real smiles!

A few days before, check how long it usually takes to get to your location at the session time to account for typical traffic. Then add about 15-30 minutes of leeway in case of traffic or to have wiggle room if changing on location.

Giving a few extra minutes can prevent stress from hijacking the vibe!

3. Prep Kids

Make getting ready so special! Make a big deal about doing their hair, their special outfit, and how much fun you're going to have.

Talk to kids on the ride over and tell them what to expect! Let them know they'll be in a new location with lots of things to look at and explore, and that they'll meet a new friend who is going to take some photos of your family.

Talk about how these photos are so special to you, and that you are so excited to document how much you love each other! You'll get to snuggle, hug, play games and have fun, and that it's important to have their best listening ears on.

4. Adjust Your Expectations

Especially when your kids are younger, expect there to be some chaos! I can't tell you how many times parents have left a session saying "I don't think we got anything useable" and are shocked at how beautiful the photos turned out!

Honestly, a little bit of unpredictability makes things exciting, and can prevent boring images! I shoot fast, so really only need a split second! As long as parents keep smiling, it works!

Shift your approach away from threats and commands ("stand here and smile or you won't get ice cream" rarely gets a genuine smile!), to invitations to play and connect. If they're really interested in checking out a cool spot, join them! If they're having a sad moment, snuggle! We're here to document connection, so lean in (and smile through it!). The in between moments are so special, so breathe through any frustration. Trust that your photographer is good at her job, and you'll be surprised at how full your gallery is, even when things feel chaotic!



5. Special Treats

I generally don't like to lead with a bribe, but sometimes it helps, especially towards the end of the session! Small treats like mini marshmallows, Smarties, or white chocolate chips, can be a mess free motivator!

Making the session feel like a fun and special experience vs. something to endure and get through, goes a long way. If you want to go out for ice cream or another special reward, don't make it dependant on their behavior. Instead, use it to build excitement and engagement, like "who is so excited for ice cream? What flavor are you getting? Do you like getting a cone or a cup?"



SESSION DAY CHECKLIST:

I highly recommend bringing the following items to your session:

- water (for infants: you're always welcome to feed them as needed!)
- snacks that won't stain or get clothing dirty
- baby wipes if you have a little one, for cleanup if they get dirty or have a runny nose
- lipstick/gloss/chapstick for touchups
- towels, especially if the session is near water
- if you have little ones, bring the stroller or wagon to make transporting everything easy

A few more tips:

- Put phones away. It rarely works to show a child a video during a session, and almost always leads to a fit when the video is turned off. I recommend leaving them in the car anyway, because I always have dads empty their pockets since phones are not cute in photos.
- If your little one is obsessed with toys and won't leave them behind, there are plenty of photogenic toys you can let them use during your session. I particularly recommend small, unpainted wooden toys. They'll hardly show during photos, and they can make a great surprise for your little one so that they're excited for picture taking!