

13 Lessons to Teach Your Child About Digital Photography



Today while sorting through some old boxes I found a photo album filled with the first ever photos that I took as a young budding photographer. I was around nine years old when I first started using our family's film point and shoot camera and I still remember my Dad's 'training' on how to use it. Basically it consisted of this advice:

'Don't take too many shots'

Remember, this was back in the day of film photography where film and processing costs made my Dad's advice pretty sound. However looking back over my early images I wish he'd taught me a few other things about taking photos. Here's some of the advice I could have benefited from hearing.

Note - before I start I should say that you can probably teach a child too much about photography and 'kill' some of the playfulness that I think makes the images that a child can take special. My main advice would be to instill in your child the first lesson below - of experimenting and having fun:



1. Experiment

Looking over many of the shots that I took in those early days shows me that I took a lot of shots of almost exactly the same things. I approached my subjects in much the same way with every shot and as a result ended up with very similar results. Teach your child how to vary their shots in a number of these ways:

- shoot from different perspectives - [up high](#), [down low](#) etc
- getting in close - stepping back for a wider angle shot
- [moving around your subject](#) to shoot from different sides
- experimenting with different settings (teaching them about different exposure modes)



2. Check your Backgrounds

A very simple concept that can enhance an image is to check out the background of a shot to check for clutter or distraction.

Teach your children to scan the background (and the foreground) of an image quickly and to change their framing if there's too many distractions - otherwise their shots will end up like mine used to with all kinds of objects growing out of the heads of those I was photographing.

Read more about [How to Get Backgrounds Right](#)

3. Hold the Camera Straight



The other obvious problem with many of my first images is that they rarely lined up straight. In fact after viewing my first album for a few minutes I began to feel quite dizzy!

While shots that are not straight can be quite effective (they can be playful or give a more 'candid' feel to them) it is good to teach your children to check the framing of their shot before hitting the shutter.

Read more on [Getting Horizons Horizontal](#) and [Getting Images Straight](#)

4. How to Hold a Camera



It is easy to assume that everyone knows how to hold a digital camera - however while many people do it intuitively some will not - particularly children who are unfamiliar with them. In fact I've seen a lot of adults who could do with a lesson or two on how to hold a camera and whose images must suffer with camera shake as a result of poor technique.

A quick lesson on securing your camera could help a child get clear, shake free images for years to come.

Further Reading on [How to Hold a Digital Camera](#)



5. Get in Close

Almost all of the shots that took in my first rolls of film have my subject somewhere off into the distance of the shot. This is partly because the camera that I was using didn't have a zoom lens - but it was partly because I didn't understand how getting in close would help capture the detail of a subject.

Teach your children how to use the zoom on your digital camera - but don't forget to teach them how using their legs to move closer can achieve the same results!

Learn more about [Filling Your Frame](#)

6. Take Lots of Photos



While my Dad's advice did save our family a lot of money at the time - with the advent of digital photography, taking lots of pictures is no longer something that is too costly (although there are costs in terms of storing them all). Taking lots of images is a great way to learn different techniques of photography.

While you probably will want to encourage your children not to take 100 shots of exactly the same thing - encourage them to experiment with lots of different shots over time and as they do you'll see their photography improve.

7. Getting the Balance Right Between Photographing People, 'Things' and Places



I still remember coming back from my first overseas trip as a teenager (a school trip) and showing my parents my photos. Their first comment was that I had hardly taken any shots of people. All my shots had been of buildings. While some of them were interesting - I missed one of the most important aspects of the trip - those I was traveling with.

I chatted to a friend with two children recently and she told me that one of her children did the same thing with me - but the other came back from a school trip with hundreds of photos of their friends but none of the sites that they saw. I guess some children get too focused on photographing sites and some too focused upon photographing people. If you see your child doing this - perhaps reflect back to them that they think about different types of photography.

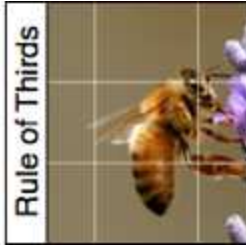
8. Find a Point of Interest



Interesting photographs have interesting things in them - they need a visual point of interest (a focal point). Teach your child to identify what this point of interest is before hitting the shutter.

Once they've identified the point of interest they can then think about how to highlight it (by positioning themselves, using their zoom etc).

Learn more about [Finding Points of Interest in Your Photography](#)



9. Rule of Thirds

A simple principle of photography that I've taught a number of children is the Rule of Thirds. While I've talked numerous times about how breaking this rule can also be a powerful effect - it is something that I've found really can lift a child's images - particularly when they are photographing other people.

Even if the child doesn't completely understand to position their subject right on the intersecting third points - to teach them how to place their subject off centre can be enough.

Read our [Rule of Thirds](#) Tutorial

10. Review Your Children's Images with Them



One thing that you can do to help your children drastically improve their photography is to sit down at the computer with them after they've been out with their camera to go through their shots.

As you scroll through them pause to affirm them with what they've done well and to point out things that they could do better next time to improve their results. Pay particular attention to the shots that they do well with as this will give them positive reinforcement and inspiration to keep going with their hobby.



11. Focal Lock

One important technique that children will do well to learn is how to use focal lock. While most cameras do well in auto focusing upon subjects there are times when you'll end up with shots that are out of focus because the camera doesn't know what the main subject is (particularly if they are placing subjects off centre with the rule of thirds).

Teach your child how to press the shutter halfway down to focus and then to frame the shot while still holding it down and they'll have a skill that they'll use forever!

[Learn how to Use Focal Lock](#)



12. Different Modes for Different Situations

The day that I discovered my family film camera had a little dial for different 'shooting modes' on it was a day my photography improved a little. Most digital cameras these days have the ability to switch a camera into modes like 'portrait', 'sports', 'macro' etc.

Teach your child what these modes mean and when to switch to them and you'll be taking them a step closer to learning about how their camera works and how to learn about manual exposure modes (see the next point).

Just knowing that different situations will mean you need to use different settings is an important lesson for kids to learn as it helps them to become more aware of not only their subject but things like how light, focal distance and subject movement can impact a shot.

Read our tutorial on [Different Camera Modes](#)



13. Exposure Settings

Once your child has a good grasp on the above techniques it might be time to teach them some basics of exposure (this might be one for slightly older kids). Learning about the three elements of ISO, Aperture and Shutter Speed are a useful place to start your lessons and giving them an introduction to how changing these settings can impact a photo.

The best way for them to learn this is by introducing them to Aperture and Shutter priority modes.

What do You Teach Your Children?

Of course deciding which of the above lessons for kids on photography to teach your child will depend upon their age and experience. Some are obviously more appropriate for some children than others. I'd be interested to hear what readers do when it comes to this topic? What have you taught your kids?

With my own son (who is 16 months old) we're obviously not up to any of these - however I am teaching him to become familiar with cameras - showing him images once they've been taken on the LCD, letting him look through the viewfinder and even pressing the shutter. This familiarization is really nothing more than that - but in doing so he's becoming more comfortable with cameras - and I've noticed when I'm photographing him (which does happen a lot) he's much more happy to pose for me.