

# THE RULES

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**Meet our expert**  
**Annabel Williams**  
Annabel is one of the country's best-known kids photographers. She doesn't believe in hard and fast rules for taking great shots of kids, but we guarantee her guidelines will have you taking better pictures of little people in no time.

One subject. **THE** nine rules you need to know. Welcome to the ultimate **definitive** guide

## The **nine rules** for photographing kids

Wave goodbye to static poses, cheesy grins and face-pulling as we deliver the advice you need to make photographing kids as easy as A, B, C

Whippersnappers, little angels, rugrats, cherubs... whatever you choose to call your kids, they make a great photographic subject. Given that we're well into the summer holidays, we thought it was high time to equip you with a range of techniques that'll help you get some great shots. Chances are, your kids could well be climbing the walls, so this feature will give you a great opportunity to spend some time having fun and taking shots.

Fortunately, unlike a number of other photographic disciplines, getting great shots of kids isn't a technical minefield. Sure, you need to know how your DSLR works, and which features will stack the odds in your favour. But when it comes to capturing kids, it's also about engaging with your subject and having a good time. Follow these nine nuggets of advice and you'll soon be getting shots that you (and the grandparents) will be happy to hang on the wall.



### **Rule 1** Be prepared... but not too prepared!

Set some time aside to take pictures of your kids and stick to it, even if you're already going out for the day or it's pouring with rain (see Rule 8). Be prepared to work in any weather, anywhere, with any background and any clothing. If you decide in your mind that you are going to work with whatever is presented to you on the day, it makes your job 100 percent easier. Pre-conceived ideas, worrying about rain, or thinking you have nowhere inspiring to shoot, kills your creativity. If you start with the attitude that you can do anything and you're just going to work with what you've got, you will be able to. Trust me!

While preparation is good, don't turn up with reams and reams of picture ideas that you want to try - if your kids don't play ball, you'll end up frustrated and feeling that the shoot is a failure. By all means take a rough list of ideas to try, but it's better to work 'on the hoof' and develop ideas as you go along.



PICTURE SETTINGS:  
Aperture: f/5.6  
Shutter speed:  
1/400sec  
ISO 800

## Rule 2 Don't worry about your equipment

When photographing kids you need to think about your subjects – it's all about what you are photographing, rather than what you are photographing with. You'll probably be delighted to hear that I avoid using photo kit like reflectors and flashguns as I think the children will feel like they are being photographed and the results are unlikely to be as natural – you need to be discreet and keep things simple. Set up your camera so you don't need to change anything on it, and this will allow you to concentrate entirely on the children.

I use aperture-priority, a setting of f/5.6, one shot autofocus, ISO 800 (or ISO 400 if it's really bright), auto white-balance, large JPEG format and multi-pattern metering. I also set my focusing system to just the central focusing point. When shooting, I always place this central focusing point over the area I want to be in focus and correctly exposed – hold the shutter down half way to freeze this, move the camera to the composition I want, and then finish pressing the shutter.



Select your settings and stick with them. Don't fuss around changing dials between shots



### PICTURE SETTINGS:

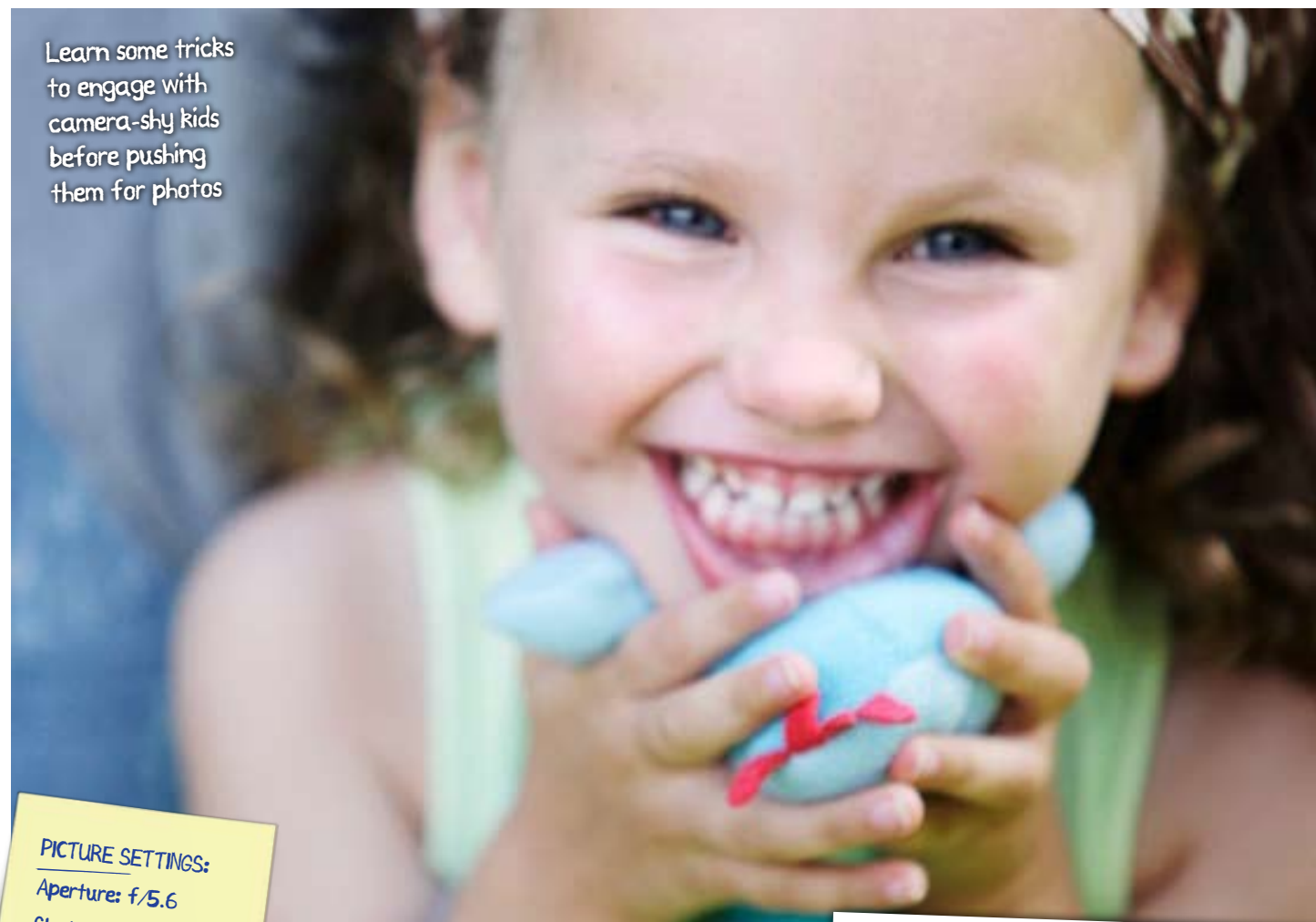
Aperture: f/5.6

Shutter speed:  
1/125sec

ISO 800



Learn some tricks to engage with camera-shy kids before pushing them for photos



**PICTURE SETTINGS:**  
Aperture: f/5.6  
Shutter speed: 1/320sec  
ISO 800

### Rule 3 Spend time with the kids first

It's important that you engage with your kids and leave the camera out of sight to start with. If I'm photographing a child that's being shy when the camera comes out, I tend to acknowledge them, then ignore them and do some shots with the other kids first - this works every time, because children are naturally curious and they will want your attention. If you give a lot of attention to them straight away, they will quickly become bored with you. Let them get your attention themselves, and they will want to get to know you.

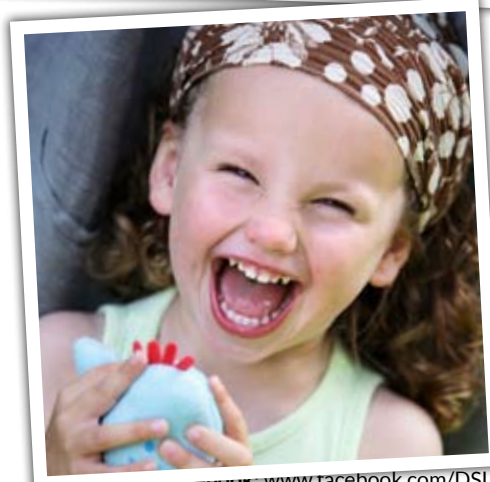
If they're being really outgoing, I talk to them calmly, and chat with them, allowing them to lead the conversation, whilst trying to get them off the ceiling!

Once I feel they are starting to talk to me, I might say: "OK, who wants to show me the garden?" Usually young children jump at the chance, because I've given them a job, an important role, and kids

love to have boundaries and little games, or the chance to feel important. This all helps me to engage with them, show them we're going to have fun and turn the whole shoot into an adventure and experience for them, rather than what they were expecting. Remember, no cameras have come out yet!

If you're shooting kids that aren't your own, try asking their name, and you'll find they often won't answer - so I start guessing - saying: "Is it Iggle Piggle (or any other TV character)?" The sillier the better - they usually start laughing and saying "No" to each one, and start to relate to me, until they finally tell me their name.

With young kids I might also ask them if they are going to be my gorgeous models. I never talk about "taking their photos" - always about modelling in a shoot, so it sounds fun and not something they are used to.



### Rule 4 Pick your spot carefully

Once I have the kids on my side, I look at the places I want to shoot. Obviously, if it's a place you're already familiar with (your garden, the local park) you'll know where the best spots are. But if you're out for the day you'll need to think on your feet. I look for colour and texture, and I also look for top shade - a big tree, a porch doorway - anything with something that will give a flattering area of light.

With very young children I like to create a "set" that they can play in, where the background and light are consistent and I can shoot away while they move around anywhere in that area.



### Rule 5 Get the light right

Look for even, flattering light - not patchy sunlight. A doorway or tree always creates this kind of light. I never use flash because I prefer natural light - it's softer, more flattering and much easier to use! Patches of sunlight look good on clothing, but not on the face. Kids will squint if they are in the sun, so if you are on a beach with no shade, turn them around so the sun is behind them.

If you can't see the light, then try asking the child to help you. Ask them to stand and face you - look at the light on their face - then ask them to turn round, and you walk to the other side and look at the light in that direction. One way or another, it will work and you will see which angle will work best.





## Rule 6 Change clothes

Once I've found a few backgrounds, I look at their clothes and pick different options for each background in order to create variety in the pictures and keep it interesting for the kids. So if I chose a field of buttercups for the first shoot, I would look for clothes that either blend or contrast with the green and yellow of the field. If it's a painted blue door, I

would look for clothes that would work with that. I select two or three different looks to ensure I don't get creative block later. I always leave fun clothes like tutus until the end so I can keep bribing the children with: "we're just doing this shot, then we can put the tutu on". Once they are in their tutu, it's then much harder to get them to put on the posh frock their grandma want them to wear!



If your subject is patient, experiment with different items of clothing to vary your photos



## Rule 7 Keep it short and sweet

You will get the best results if the kids are enjoying themselves – so keep each little shoot short (about 15 minutes max) before you change your background. Then have a break – get them a drink and a biscuit and relax yourself, too! Then change clothes and go out to a different location. If you find something is not working, it will probably never work so just cut your losses and change it.

Don't be afraid to say: "This isn't working, I need to change it". Don't keep on trying to do something, you will just upset the child, just keep them happy! Never take them back to the place they were crying in – they will always remember!



## Rule 8 Don't worry if it's raining

You can capture great shots in the rain. Clouds create beautiful soft light. Take a white umbrella and shoot underneath it, asking the parents to hold the broolly. If it's torrential rain, shoot in a doorway until it stops (you may get soaked but that doesn't matter)! Put colourful wellies and plastic raincoats on the kids as they look great in pictures!

**"You may get soaked in the rain, but that doesn't matter"**



PICTURE SETTINGS:  
Aperture: f/5.6  
Shutter speed: 1/160sec  
ISO 800



Kids can't resist jumping in puddles, so why not make a photo of it - just be careful of the splashes!



## Rule 9 Get some help

Many people tell me they find that they think using someone to help you take the pictures can prove distracting. I often use the kids' parents as they help me to get great shots, and making them part of the whole experience is key so I recommend you do the same.

Get your husband, wife, partner or grandparents involved and they will help

you get better shots. Just make sure they don't start directing your kids and asking them to smile. If you follow the tips I've highlighted, you stack the odds in your favour to get great shots so you don't need to have people asking them to 'smile' or 'look at the camera'.

I usually ask them to stand behind me and make silly faces at the kids so I can get them laughing – it usually works!

Assistant Editor Matty uses 'Lottie the Elephant' to capture the attention of his camera-shy model



“Get your partner or the grandparents involved – they'll help you get better shots”



### Finding people to photograph

If you don't have little ones of your own, you can be sure that your friends would love to have some beautiful images of their kids to hang up on the living room walls. What's more, the photography will act as excellent entertainment for their little brood and the added bonus is that they'll be away from the TV screen – at least for a couple of hours anyway. Remember that it is very important to have permission to photograph kids and failure to secure this permission is not only disrespectful, but will also lead to unwanted attention.

to come

### NEXT MONTH

## The rules for capturing the beauty of autumn

As the leaves start to fall and summer gives way to autumn, we explain how to capture the essence of this glorious season

For more info on the gear you need to photograph portraits, visit [www.Jessops.com/therules](http://www.Jessops.com/therules)