

# How to take Beautiful Candid Photographs

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Taking great photographs of family and friends in social situations is one of the real perks of having a camera. The more flattering their images, the more they'll be happy for you to shoot them, and you'll be able to capture lots of happy memories. Try our tips for keeping them smiling...

## Shooting mode



To make sure the attention is on your subjects' faces, shoot portraits in [aperture-priority mode](#). This enables you to select a large aperture such as f/2.8 or f/4 to create a shallow depth of field that will throw a distracting, busy background out of focus.

## Daylight shooting

Generally, daylight gives the best results for portraits. Late afternoon sun has a warm glow, while overcast conditions throw a cool, soft light. Indoors, go for natural light from a window, perhaps with a couple of reflectors to reduce facial shadows (and you don't need to spend a fortune on reflectors, either – a piece of white or silver card will do the trick). Another useful technique is to use a bit of overexposure to slightly bleach out complexions, especially if they're none-too-even, for very flattering results.

## Shooting in artificial light



Make sure your white balance setting is on auto or the setting for the specific type of light (e.g. tungsten, fluorescent). To avoid using the pop-up flash, which can cast unflattering shadows, choose as wide an aperture as possible to make the most of the available light, and set the ISO as high as you can without compromising your shutter speed – use ISO 800 as a starting point, and experiment from there (remember, in aperture-priority mode your camera is choosing the shutter speed).

### **Flash**

If using flash is unavoidable, remember to set the white balance to the flash (lightning bolt) setting. Many Nikon cameras have a 'Party/Indoor' Scene modes menu, which gives a nice balance between your flash's output and the ambient room lighting. While 'normal' flash photography could result in an underexposed background, in this mode your camera will automatically set a longer exposure to allow more of the ambient light to be captured, thus improving the background exposure so you capture more of the scene (although the slower shutter speed increases the risk of camera shake, so do steady your camera to minimise this). This mode is also ideal for recording candlelight and other indoor background lighting. If you have a Nikon Speedlight, use it with the flash head angled towards a cream or white ceiling or wall, to give a large, soft light that eliminates harsh shadows and creates a much more flattering effect.

### **Lens choice**

The classic Nikkor prime lenses for camera portraits are 35mm, 50mm, 58mm, 85mm, 105mm and 135mm. They all have a fast maximum aperture, enabling lots of light to hit the sensor so you work in lower light without risk of blur, and will capture features in good proportion for very natural results. Wideangles are a great choice when you want to capture your subject's surroundings, to give context to the shot, but get too close and they'll distort features – and your subject might not be too happy at suddenly developing a Pinocchio nose or a Jimmy Hill chin... A standard zoom gives you the best of both worlds – for a DX camera,

try 18-55mm, 18-105mm or 18-140mm, or for an FX DSLR the 24-70mm or 24-85mm.

### **Framing and focusing**

Double-check that body parts haven't been accidentally amputated. Trees and lamp posts growing out of heads can ruin a shot, too, so you might need to change your position slightly to prevent this. The key with any portraits where you're making eye contact with your subject is to ensure the eyes are in sharp focus. A fool-proof way to do this is to position an AF point on one of your subject's eyes, half-depress the shutter button to lock onto that setting, then recompose and fully depress the shutter to get your shot. Spot-metering from the point of focus is a good idea – again, that focus point will be the eyes in most situations.

### **Children**



With kids, shooting from their level prevents the distortion of bigger heads and little feet you sometimes get when photographing little ones from a standing position. Plus, you will see more of their face and less of the top of their head, and it can also give your images a better feel for how they see the world. A zoom is the perfect lens for capturing images of children at play, enabling you to zoom in and compose by including only what is important to your shot. For example, if you're photographing a child blowing bubbles, instead of a full-length image with lots of background, zoom into their face as they blow the bubbles. Kids are also notorious for not wanting to stand still for the camera, so go with the flow and photograph them in action – set a fast shutter speed and, if your camera has it, use the sports scene mode to ensure you freeze the action, instead of ending up with a blur running through the image.

### **Babies**

Catch a baby after breakfast or lunch, when they're happy and fed, and not tired and grumbling for food or a nap. Favourite toys and rattles can be useful for grabbing their attention. And make sure you're ready before the moment arrives, camera settings chosen and finger primed on the shutter release. Natural light is perfect for babies – the last thing

you want to do is startle them with flash. A fast prime lens such as the 50mm f/1.4 will help you get physically close and focus sharply on your subject, with a pleasantly blurred, non-distracting background. Again, faster shutter speeds are important in capturing those fleeting expressions.

### **Quick tips**

- Using the motordrive setting can help increase your hit rate, especially where fidgety children are concerned!
- If your camera has portrait scene mode, this will take care of the metering and exposure, so you're free to concentrate on capturing the moment.
- Face-Priority AF is a feature on some Nikon cameras that actively focuses on faces, increasing your chances of capturing them sharply.