

A young girl with blonde hair is shown in profile, holding a pink stuffed animal. She is wearing a white top with a gold patterned scarf. The background is a soft, out-of-focus white.

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**SEVEN**  
MUST-HAVE  
**SHOTS**  
BEFORE YOUR  
**CHILD**  
TURNS 7!  

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## 7 MUST-HAVE PHOTOS BEFORE YOUR CHILD TURNS 7!

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### 1. FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

The first day of school is a special time in a child's life. It's also bittersweet for us parents. Suddenly your little one is all grown up and headed out the door with a backpack in hand. It can be an emotional day for everyone!

That's why it's even more important to make sure you capture the day in a unique way. It doesn't matter if you snap a cell phone pic or grab the big camera, just document it. When you sit back and wonder where the years have gone, you'll have a tangible reminder of those special milestones in your child's life - and the first day of school is a big one. Now, I say tangible because I want to remind you to actually print your pictures. They serve no purpose sitting on a memory card or held prisoner on your phone. Give your kids the gift of being able to hold a photograph of themselves in their own hands!!

Here are a few things to remember when taking those first-day-of-school pictures.

1. Have everything ready the night before. Make sure the battery for your camera is charged. Clear off the memory card. Leave the camera somewhere you won't forget it.
2. Grab a few detail shots. New shoes. New clothes. New backpacks. The pencil case they picked out themselves. Their lunch bag. What's inside their lunch bag. All the fun stuff that comes along with the first day of school.
3. Don't stop shooting. If your child walks to school, stay a few steps behind and snap some pictures. If they ride the bus, grab a shot of them piling on. Maybe even their cute little face in the school bus window.
4. Start a tradition. Choose something to do the same way every year so that you can document the big changes that happen over the course of a school year.

A photograph of two young girls walking away from the camera on a paved sidewalk. The girl on the left has long brown hair and is wearing a denim jacket and floral leggings. The girl on the right has curly hair and is wearing a striped sweater and a large, colorful backpack. The backpack features a family photo, a rainbow, and a school bus. The text "School Days" is overlaid in a white, hand-drawn font across the middle of the image. The scene is set outdoors with grass and a road in the background.

School Days

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### 2. THEIR FAVORITE THINGS

Both of my girls have a special lovie they've had since the day they were born. For my oldest, it was a doll she got at the hospital. For my 8 year old, it's a blanket she still sleeps with every night.

They love to look back on pictures and see how they've grown with their lovie. Seeing a photograph sparks a memory. Like the time my little one brought her blanket to a restaurant and left it behind. We didn't realize it until we were in the parking lot and had to walk all the way back, hoping and praying it was still there. (It was!)

We've brought Dolly to the park and placed her in a swing. She's come on vacations and car rides, shopping trips and sleepovers. My little one has used her blanket as a cape pretending to be a superhero. Sometimes it's a picnic blanket or even a towel after the bath.

A favorite toy or a lovie is something special in a child's life and it deserves to be documented. Often times at a family shoot, I'll hear parents tell their children to put away a tattered, old blanket or a stuffed animal that looks worn, but those are the very things that should be captured.

I've got a challenge for you today. Set aside 5 minutes with your little one and photograph their favorite toy. Ask them why it's their favorite. What do they love about it? Get them involved. Ask if they'd like to take a picture. Encourage them to be IN the picture. If they are playing, sit back and observe for a minute. Capture details during play. Little fingers holding a toy. Little feet nestled under a blanket. Chubby wrists clutching a stuffed animal.



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### 3. YOUR CHILD SLEEPING

Admit it, there's nothing more angelic than a photo of a child sleeping? As a mom myself, I spent countless hours when my girls were born staring at them while they slept. Studying their features. Watching them breathe. A sleeping child gives you a chance to appreciate who they are.

But, have you ever stopped to snap a picture? When my oldest was in school and I was home with my little one, I would take tons of pictures of her sleeping. Sometimes I would zoom in on her lashes or focus on her little pink lips. She loved snuggling with a stuffed animal or, of course, her blankie.

Now that cell phone cameras are readily available, it's pretty easy to snap a picture of your little one snoozing. Here are a few tips to help you get the most out of your camera phone.

1. Wait for your camera to focus. I know it sounds obvious, but a lot of people don't wait and wonder why their pictures are always blurry. Make sure you hold the phone steady. Use two hands!
2. Don't use the zoom. Zooming in on a camera phone will give you more grain. Take the shot and you can always crop later.
3. If you want to brighten up your picture, tap the darkest part of the screen to adjust the exposure. You can also add brightness afterwards using an editing app like Instagram or Pic.Tap.Go.
4. Use natural light whenever you can. If your child typically falls asleep in a dark room, change up your routine and see if they'll snooze on a couch or somewhere with good light. I promise you it'll be worth it!
5. Take a moment to think about composition before snapping the picture. Move around and see if there's a better angle. Get in super close to focus on details or take a step back to give the image some context.



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### 4. YOUR CHILD AND THEIR PET

I've grown up with pets. Birds, fish, a hamster, and dogs. None of them lasted. We were not very smart or responsible. If you looked back at a photo album from my childhood, you'd never know that we had pets. There's not one picture!

Last year, we adopted a dog. It wasn't planned. I've always loved animals, but I wasn't ready for the responsibility of a pet. My husband persisted and I eventually caved. Lady, our 2 year old Pitbull pup has quickly become part of the family!

I've been pretty good about taking pictures of her. I want my children to look back at images of their childhood and know that they had a pet who they loved. I take the same approach to photographing our dog as I do photographing children, although pets require a bit more patience.

Lighting is important. Try to use natural light whenever possible. Get them close to a window or go outside.

Make sure your shutter speed is high enough to capture any movement. You might want to switch to Shutter Priority when photographing pets on the go.

Get on their level. Even if that means laying on the ground. It'll give the image some perspective. Like you're in their world.

Use a prop. Take out your pet's favorite toy and see if your child will play with him/her. Wait for moments that show their connection. My youngest treats Lady like a sibling. She loves to read to her. If she's sleeping on the couch, she'll come over and lay a blanket over her. She teaches her tricks. She dances with her. She feeds her. I want to make sure I capture all of those memories.

Studies have shown that pets provide comfort and can teach children how to nurture. They can help with anxiety and bring families closer together. If an animal has the power to do all this, you better believe they deserve a few pages in your family photo album!





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### 5. MISSING TEETH

There is nothing quite like a child's grin after they have lost their first tooth. It's usually around age 7 when kids start to lose their baby teeth and simultaneously, their innocence. Those gap-toothed grins are just the beginning of changes that seem to speed up the clock. I remember feeling sad when my youngest lost her first tooth. I felt like she changed overnight. All of a sudden my baby was gone. It was even more evident once those adorable little baby teeth were replaced by these giant, crooked chompers!

When kids start to lose their teeth, it's easy for them to get shy about their smile. And that could lead to anxiety about pictures. I want to share with you a few tips that help me to get genuine smiles from children. The most important thing to remember though is that you're documenting real life. It doesn't have to be perfect and neither do their smiles.

Get Silly.

I know it's hard to do when you're photographing your own children, but if you can forget about getting the perfect shot for a second and just enjoy yourself, it'll help your child to loosen up. Sing their favorite song and mess up the lyrics on purpose. Make animal sounds. Tell a joke. Start a story and ask them to add in funny details.

Just Wait

I feel like I've been saying this a lot in these lessons, but sit back and watch for a while. If you try and force a smile, it won't come. But, if you have your children engage in something they love to do and wait for them to look up, a smile will come naturally.

Try the Opposite.

Ask them not to smile. I'm not sure why this works. Is it their curious nature? Or do they like to think they are doing something wrong. Whatever the reason, if you ask a child not to smile, the opposite usually happens. Sort of like when you say, "Don't look!" What's the first thing you do? Look, of course!



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### 6. YOUR CHILD AND THEIR BFF'S

For this lesson, I'm specifically talking about your little one's preschool friends. In most cases, those are their first friends. They are usually in the same class every year as 3, 4 and 5 year olds. Once Kindergarten rolls around, the group may get split up and your child will form new friendships. Those relationships are just as important to document, however there's something so special about a child's first friend.

Today I want to share with you a few ideas for poses as well as tips for shooting a group of kids.

Line up all the littles. Make sure there are no distractions in the background so your focus is drawn to the kids and only the kids. When you are trying to get a shot of little ones in a group don't stress about getting everyone to look at the camera. Preschoolers are notoriously wiggly so it might be hard to get them perfectly posed.

Huddle up. Have all of the kids put their arms around each other in a semi-circle while you shoot from below sort of like a football huddle. Tell them to keep their heads together and lean in close. Just keep an eye on what's behind them in the shot. Because you're below you might be able to capture a nice, blue sky in the background.

Get on the ground. Another fun perspective! Have the kids lay on the ground with their heads touching. You'll need to get up high to fit everyone in the frame. Use a step ladder if there's one available.

Hug it out. Have the kids link arms (you might need to show them how instead of just explaining) and shoot from behind. If you have a someone else around to help, have them keep the kids attention towards the front so no one is turning their head around. It's a nice way to show closeness and interaction without worrying about smiles.



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### 7. IN THE TUB

You made it to the end! This is the last of 7 must-have photos before your child turns 7.

My final must-have shot is your child in the tub. Whether it be their first bath as a newborn or a quick rinse in the kitchen sink, I believe it's a necessary shot of childhood.

One of my all time favorite images of my oldest daughter is a shot of her taking a bath in my mother's kitchen sink. It brings back such fond memories of being at her house and she was always so happy splashing around.

If you've got a little one who loves to spend time in the tub, here are a few quick tips to help you capture the moment.

Change your perspective. Try shooting at a variety of angles. Get on the same level as the tub. Shoot from high above. Go below. Get creative!

Capture details. Wrinkled fingers and toes. Tiny hands touching the faucet. Even colorful bath toys.

Use a wide angle lens so you can capture the entire scene. If you don't have one, get yourself up on a step ladder or take a few steps back!

Play around with white balance. If you can change your white balance settings, play around with them to see which one gives you the best color. A lot of indoor lighting will make your pictures look yellowish so you'll want to switch to something with more blue in it to balance things out.

If you have any other ideas about must-have shots of childhood, I'd love to hear them. Please feel free to email me anytime at [stacy@stacymaephoto.com](mailto:stacy@stacymaephoto.com).

