

The Perfect Portrait

Three options for obtaining photos you can treasure.

by Kate Winn

Remember the last time you tried to get a good picture of your children? The whining, the crying, the screaming – and the kids weren't happy either! To maximize your portrait-taking experience and take home photos you'll treasure, read on!

Using a chain studio

The advantage of studio chains (Sears, Superstore, Wal-Mart, etc.) is that they take kids' pictures every day, and have it down to a science. Advertised packages can start at less than \$10 (though you may not need a 10" x 13" or 32 minis), and studios offer a great variety of backgrounds and props, digital enhancements and a range of products. For impatient parents (are there any other kind?), Sears portraits can be printed on the spot and Superstore packages are ready the next day.

The downside is that short appointments and cramped conditions can make kids feel confined and misbehave, and the portraits may end up looking rushed or forced. Some parents also avoid chain studios fearing they'll end up with the same old standard, traditional poses.

There may be a sitting fee, and you will likely face a post-session sales pitch, which could either be a time-waster or a wallet-lightener. Also, keep in mind that studio photographs are usually copyrighted material, making it illegal for you to reproduce any of the pictures you purchase.

Tips: Many websites offer coupons, package details and background samples. Try www.searsportrait.ca, www.photolab.ca or www.walmartportraits.com. Summon up the willpower to stick to your budget – your partner may be helpful. If you want flexibility, Trish Vanier, a Wal-Mart Portrait Studio manager, recommends purchasing the CD containing all of the photos from your session. This gives you the copyright to print whatever you want.



Photo: Cerrn Weatherbe

Hiring a photographer

Though most photographers can take your portraits in their own studios, many parents are taking advantage of the option of having the professional come to them.

Hiring a photographer to come to the home means there is no travel, no one waiting behind you, and the fridge and potty are nearby. Plus, kids are generally more at ease in their home environment. "We can incorporate favourite toys or pets, anything to make the kids comfortable," says photographer Cathy Schofield. She also points out that when it comes to family portraits, this comfort zone doesn't only appeal to the kids: "Some Dads really relax more and are open to different kinds of shots than they would be in a studio." Few men are comfortable lying on the floor in a department store!

Another advantage is that professionals can edit your pics to perfection, which, compared to the do-it-yourself option, certainly saves you time and effort. Usually, the photographer will provide you with a CD, which allows you to print what you want.

Of course, all this comes with a cost. Session fees average around \$100 for a small family and increase

from there, and usually the responsibility for printing the photos is yours. Most parents find it well worth the price to have an experienced photographer who can provide a unique vision for both the photography and the editing.

Tips: "The park or the backyard can make things different and fun," says Schofield, so select a location where your kids will be at their best. If you're staying inside, declutter: "The most beautiful homes can have distracting backgrounds," says photographer Amy Hibbert. She also suggests that if your children are unlikely to sit still, choose a photographer who will follow them around to get candid shots, which look much more natural than forced poses. Ask to see samples of work to give you an idea of the type of portraits you'll end up with.

Do-it-yourself

The most economical option is to take your own portraits. This route is also best if you want ultimate control over the finished product. From poses to lighting, cropping to colour, you create your pictures, which can easily be shared with family and friends, either in hard copy or through sites such as Facebook or Flickr.

The catch, of course, is that you are responsible for all of the photography, editing and printing.

Tips: A book like *Digital Photography For Dummies* can get you started. Then figure out what system works for you. You can edit your photos at home, and either print them yourself or send them over the web to be printed at labs such as Black's, Costco or Loblaws. You can also bring your memory card, stick, or CD into the store and do your editing and printing there, though you may have to wait in line for a kiosk.

Kate Winn is a freelance writer and teacher. She and her husband usually leave their daughters' portraits to the professionals.

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