

FAMILY OUTING

By Kent DuFault

Family outings are ripe with the opportunity to create fantastic storytelling photography, especially when children are involved.

However, there are challenges. The primary issue that I have found when trying to create compelling story-like images with family outings is that no one else in the family cares about it as much as I do.

Therefore, there is a resistance to setting up a shot.

You are likely to encounter this too. Family outings are a 'go candid' photo situation in most cases.

The assignments in this creativity prompt will help you to learn to shoot fast and also anticipate developing situations for any photo project.



Image 001 – Photograph by Taislia Stupak



Image 002 – Photograph by Simon Rae

Awareness and anticipation are essential skills for storytelling photography on family outings. Families rarely want to sit still and pose. And even more challenging is 'seeing' an event, like that depicted in Image 002, and missing it because you're not ready.

I'll tell you upfront: trying to recreate scenes like Image 002 rarely works out. The spontaneity is lost.

How do you maximize your preparedness?

First of all, throw out that old and tiresome mainstream advice that you need to be using Manual mode. You don't need to be using Manual mode, and in fact, you may be missing fantastic opportunities because of it.

For these creativity prompt assignments, set your camera as follows:

- 1 If you have plenty of light, such as in Image 002, use Aperture Priority mode and set your aperture to f/8.



Image 003 – Photograph by Jed Owen

- 2** If the lighting is low in intensity, such as in Image 003, set your shooting mode to Shutter Priority and set the shutter speed at $1/125^{\text{th}}$ of a second.

Note: These settings will work fine for any lens up to 135mm. For family outings, I don't recommend any lens longer than 135mm. But, if you insist, you will need to raise your shutter speed appropriately, taking into account the Reciprocal Rule.

Reciprocal Rule: To create sharp hand-held pictures, your shutter speed must be equal or faster than the focal length of your lens.

For example, if your lens is a 200mm telephoto, then your shutter speed must be $1/200^{\text{th}}$ or faster. If your lens is a 400mm telephoto, then your shutter speed must be $1/400^{\text{th}}$ or faster, etc.

- 3** Set your ISO to AUTO. If your camera allows you to place a cap on how far the camera will automatically raise the ISO, then set that cap at ISO 1600.

Note: If you have tested your camera and it has performed well at ISO settings higher than 1600, then by all means, set the cap higher.



Image 004 – Photograph by Marissa Price

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Set the metering pattern to evaluative/matrix, **unless** there is strong backlighting **with** the light source included in the frame, such as in Image 004.



Image 005 – Photograph by Marissa Price

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If the light source is included in the frame, set the metering pattern to center-weighted or spot and take the camera exposure reading from a principal foreground object as indicated in Image 005.

Note: Since you are using an auto shooting mode, you will have to do one of two things

in this backlighting situation. You will have to lock the exposure setting if you need to recompose the camera (all cameras have this option) or you can use exposure compensation. But for the purposes of this creativity prompt, simply lock the exposure if you recompose.



Image 006 – Jonathan Borba

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If the scene is backlit, but the light source **is not** in the frame, then leave the metering pattern to the evaluative/matrix setting.



Image 007 – Photograph by Dimitri Houtteman



Key Point:

Great storytelling photography generally happens when you're concentrating on the story and not the tech of creating a picture. That's why the previously discussed settings will help you. As a general rule, when you're starting out with this type of photography, avoid backlighting. Your best lighting scenario will be side lighting, as demonstrated in Image 007. The second-best lighting would be to have the light source to your back.



Image 008 – Photograph by Jove Duero

- 7 Set your focus pattern to a single point or a central cluster.



Image 009 – Photograph by Jove Duero and Illustration by Kent DuFault



Key Point:

Each camera model has its own focusing system, including the number of focus points. Until you are acutely aware of how your camera focusing system works, you are well-advised to set the focusing points to a small group clustered together, typically centered. When a moment happens, you must shoot quickly. You do not want your camera inadvertently focusing on something in the background.

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Set the **Drive mode** to single shot. Have you heard the expression, "Spray and Pray"? This is what experienced photographers use to describe newer photographers who set their drive to high speed and just shoot away, hoping to get something good. Don't do that. Develop your skills of anticipation and timing. These skills will serve you well toward creating great stories with your pictures.

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Set your autofocus mode to 'one-shot focusing mode.' Each camera manufacturer has their own nomenclature for this setting. What it means is when the focus is activated and locked, the camera will shoot one photograph and then release the autofocus mechanism. Until you are very familiar with your camera, avoid the use of 'continuous focusing mode.' Again, we want the camera focused in the right place for your story. Some cameras have 'automatic focus mode' where the camera automatically switches back and forth between one-shot and continuous. You could experiment with this if it interests you.

**Assignment:**

Using the previously discussed settings, go out and shoot several family outings. For this prompt, concentrate on seeing the story and capturing it at peak action. After each shoot, examine your results. Did these settings work for you? Or do you need to make adjustments to the settings to fit your shooting style?



Image 010 (Left; Right) – Photographs by Humphrey Muleba

In photo storytelling, a potent tool is the composition element known as 'line of sight.' What is the line of sight? If someone is clearly looking at something within a photograph, a viewer of that photograph will follow the direction of their eyes.

Both photographs in Image 010 have a prominent line of sight. Let's examine if it's working or not working in these photos.

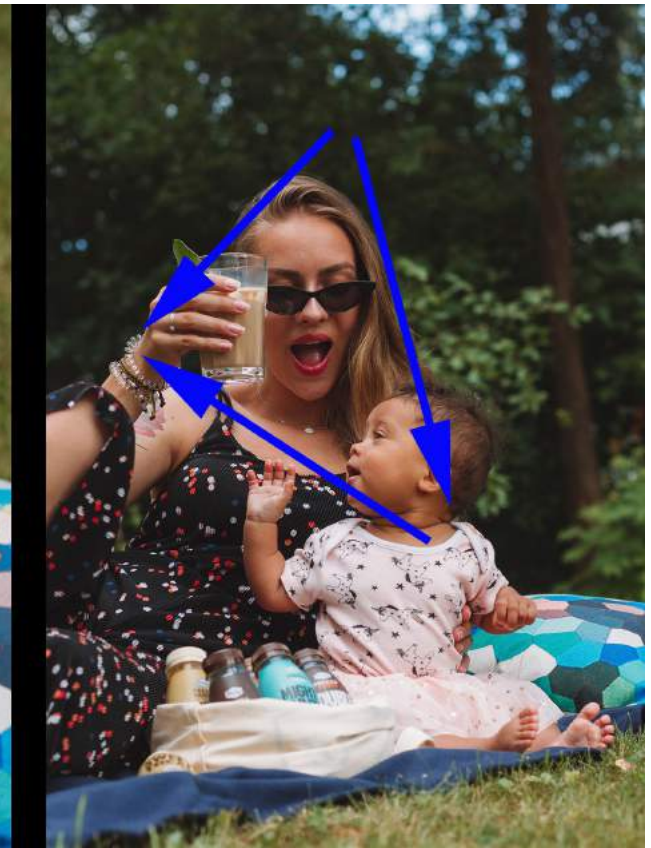


Image 011 (Left; Right) – Photographs by Humphrey Muleba

In the left photo of Image 011, the line of sight is working. However, there is a significant disruption, and that is the prominent drink held in mom's right hand. It plays no role in the story of the mother and her baby. The story is strengthened by removing it, which I did with cropping. Now the viewer sees the cute baby, and the mother's line of sight supports the baby as the subject.

In the right photo of Image 011, the line of sight is working here as well. In fact, it's working better because the line of sight now incorporates the drink into the story. The baby is interested in the glass; we see this through

the baby's line of sight. Mom doesn't want her to mess with her drink; we see that through Mom's line of sight and expression. A slight crop of that photo improved it by bringing the story forward within the frame.



Assignment:

Photograph some family outings and concentrate on using a line of sight to establish and support your story.



Image 012 – Dario Valenzuela

Image 012 is a great storytelling family moment. We see a lot in this storytelling picture: love, happiness, tenderness, and a family relationship. However, it raises a point regarding photo storytelling.



Key Point:

All scenes have a natural flow. Some scenes flow horizontally, and some scenes flow vertically. Knowing which orientation works for a scene and will best tell your photo story is a valuable skill.



Image 013 – Dario Valenzuela

A vertical (some call it 'portrait') orientation of Image 010 contains all the critical elements of the original version while pushing the story aspect forward within the frame.

I cropped it to this orientation so that you could see the difference.

Shooting the original shot in this orientation would have been a better choice as then the picture would not lose resolution through cropping.



Assignment:

Photograph several family outings. Concentrate on evaluating the flow of the scene and then positioning the orientation of your camera correctly. Should it be horizontal or vertical (landscape or portrait)?



Image 014 – Photograph by Nick Wilkes

Stories can be found in the details.



Remember:

Give your viewers credit. Let them explore and figure out what the story is, to some degree. (However, don't be so obtuse that they can't figure it out.)

Many photographers tend to be so literal in their framing of subjects that they leave nothing to the imagination. When authors do this, they call it 'overwriting.'

Look for storytelling details in a scene, and then compose your shot appropriately.

Image 014 is a perfect example of this technique.



Assignment:

Photograph several family outings with the sole purpose of capturing storytelling details. Resist the urge to be too literal and also resist the urge to be too obtuse.