

## Special Kids Photography made easier with continuous cold lights

Karen Dórame

A photographer can't create much of anything without light. Whether natural or artificial, it's critical to success. Its intensity, the type of rays emitted, its position in relation to the subject must all be considered by the artist behind the lens.

With special children, flash photography can be frightening or even hurtful. It could trigger a seizure in some children. Hot lights have a tendency to make *any* child "wilt" if exposure to them is prolonged.

Prior to becoming involved with Special Kids Photography of America, I was in the field of public relations. My photographic experience was mostly classified as photo journalism. Research for the book, *Photographing Children With Special Needs* (Amherst Media), brought me a little closer to portrait photography, but my photographic experience, to that point, still had not included studio lighting.

Many of our SKPA workshop attendees have asked about studio lighting. This year, the time had come for me to bite the bullet and do a little research on behalf of the children.

*F.J. Westcott's Pro5 Spiderlites™ with halos are great for working with all children, not just those who are especially sensitive to flash or heat.*

I began by learning what kind of lighting was available. I started with a well-known company that understood the need of providing less "invasive" lighting for the sensitive child. Although their continuous hot lights and strobe set-ups are well-accepted among photo professionals, they pointed me in the direction of F.J. Westcott Co. These folks have a product called "spider lights" that supply *cold* continuous light to the subject. These rays are also perceived as "daylight" by the camera, another nice plus for providing a natural look in the portrait.

Continuing on the "upside" for photography with special children, if tipped over, these lights are less likely to break or burn out because they are cold and very sturdy. Each cluster of 5 lights has 3 switches for adjusting the intensity of the light. The "halos" (which look like umbrellas) provide a wider spread than most other studio-type lighting—a greater "edge" for the child who may not be able to stay in one spot for a sustained period of time.

In anticipation of the obligatory "learning curve" ahead for me, I began my new research by setting up the Westcott cold lights for a young woman who is bi-polar and also has developmental and social delays. Her mother has never been able to get a satisfactory photo, because she becomes uncomfortably fixated on the camera (as shown on the left).

Out of about 60 shots, most responses resembled the one on the left. Only two or three out of the batch were "keepers."



*Vanessa's mother likes this portrait of her daughter, because it indicates her light and dark side.*

In the image on the right (below), I positioned one light behind the hanging, muslin-backed window frame, and another light at a 45 deg. angle to my subject.

Retouching included nik filters and a slight "nudge" of the skin under the chin with Photoshop's *liquefy* tool.



### 06 Workshops (SKPA Accreditation)

Tucson, AZ - Oct 16 (Mon) Come to the workshop in Diane Graham's custom studio! 435.627.1628  
Phoenix, AZ - Oct 18 (Wed) Workshop at ACCEL school for special youth 435.627.1628  
Las Vegas area (St. George, UT) - Nov 6 (Mon) Vacation in So. Utah (gateway to many national parks) and start on the road to SKPA accreditation! 435.627.1628

See SKPA website for details  
[www.specialkidsphotography.com](http://www.specialkidsphotography.com)

**Special Kids Photography of America** is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to "increase the face value" of special children  
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