



Tips for Photographing Children with Special Needs

These tips have been highly simplified. Complete explanations for each disability are available in *Photographing Children with Special Needs*, a book published by Amherst Media (see below).

- **Prepare for a different experience.** Depending on the disability, expect wheelchairs or other assistive devices, low levels of communication or response, and possible need for physical support. Also prepare yourself to expend a great deal of physical and emotional energy.
- **Learn about the child and the disability prior to a photo session.** Find out as much as you can about the child to be photographed. Interview the parent, and to any extent possible, the child. This will save time in the long run, make your job a lot easier and provide superior results. It helps to let the child see that you are no stranger to the family, allowing him/her to witness a friendly interaction with the parent or care provider prior to the shoot.
- **Allow additional time for a session.** Prepare to spend at least double the time you would for a child without disability. The ideal venue for a special needs child may be in their own home, therapy center or an environmental location (to allow for freedom of movement and natural lighting).
- **Work quickly but have patience.** Special needs children may have unexpected behaviors that will try your patience. They may be easily frustrated and tire before you accomplish what you had anticipated; so work at a more accelerated pace than normal.
- **Interaction with the child.** Explain to the child what you will be doing and ask or alert the child first before you attempt any interaction. Be careful about contact; some children do not like to be touched. Don't use food as an incentive unless encouraged by the parent.
- **Relinquish control.** Prepare to let the child take the lead. Many children may not be able to smile on demand or pose in a certain way or even look at the camera. If necessary remove the camera from the tripod and capture a superior image "on the fly." Allow the child to hold a personal object that provides comfort.
- **Be flexible.** Draw on all your professional experience and charisma to work with these special children. Prepare to switch from studio lighting to natural or flat lighting, to hand-hold your camera, have more patience, use a faster film, take more time, and capture more film frames than normal.
- **Try to capture the spirit of the child.** Rather than striving to achieve the ideal pose and smile accompanied by perfect studio lighting, relax and follow the child's movements. Capture an image when the child shows some emotion or interest in an object. Taking time to have a pre-session social exchange with the child will make your job easier. You may think you are not getting through. Nevertheless, let your actions indicate that you are really communicating.
- **Prepare the room and equipment.** Clear the path of cables, cords, and objects that could obstruct the child's path. This must be done for the safety of the child as well as for the protection of your equipment.
- **Backgrounds.** Allow for plenty of movement in front of a large background. Many children will be more comfortable on the floor. A giant cloth background that extends to the floor and continues out to your camera would be ideal.
- **Lighting.** Allow for continual or unanticipated movement. Compensate for this through flat studio lighting, handheld camera and flash or natural light.

Information provided by Special Kids Photography of America. Printing supplied by Epson America, Inc.
Order the 128 pg. book, *Photographing Children with Special Needs* from our website for \$27 - free postage (\$29.95 list price)

Or send \$27 to 700 N. Main St. Unit I-8, Washington, UT 84780

Visit our website: www.specialkidsphotography.com