

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 from the book “Prepare for Your Perfect Portrait” by Stephanie Oman

## Chapter 7

# The Family Session

*“I come from a family where gravy is considered a beverage.”*

– Erma Bombeck

## Preparing for the Family Session

### 6 rules to understand—and 5 questions to answer

When I asked my husband what his main frustration is when it comes to families being prepared, his immediate response was, “The lack thereof.” The hard truth for photographers is that rarely *ANY preparation* is done before the family portrait. There is precious little time to sit with each family and give them the guidance they need, and even photographers that require a portrait consultation seldom get all of their clients to think about every relevant aspect, or get clear on the things that create a great portrait session.

Hopefully this book will assist you in being as prepared as possible. If you take the time to understand these six rules and five questions, you will definitely impress your photographer—and your session will be a huge success. Your photographer still needs to be excellent at doing what he does, and all the technical things need to be in place, but 90% is getting on the same page so your vision has more of a chance of coming to life.

Assuming you have now decided “why” you are getting your portrait done (part 1 of this book), and you have handled your family’s basic objections, decided upon a date, and cleared everyone’s schedule, you might now be so content with the simple fact that you are getting it done, all the other stuff comes secondary.

This is what usually happens: the night before, you throw some clothes together for your family to wear, which causes much debate and arguing, causing you to give up, saying, “Alright, wear whatever you want.” STOP! Read this chapter to your family, and start thinking about what will really work best for you so everyone looks fabulous and everyone, including your photographer, is clear about your goals. Hopefully you are doing this a minimum of a week before, instead of the night before, so there will be “peace in the Jones’ family.”

**“But Mom, I have *nothing* to wear!”**

### Rule #1

Coordinate, don't "match." Thankfully it is no longer in vogue to “match” your tops and your bottoms so you look like you are in a uniform. Portraiture is about sharing your individual style and personality, while still looking like you belong as a family, so go ahead and wear all kinds of different combinations, but lay them out together in a grouping on the floor of the room where you’ll put the photo. Consider that no one set of clothing should stand out from

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the others, and that your faces need to pop, versus the clothing. Do this by coordinating “palettes” of color that intermix with one another, but NOT by doing all the same exact color.

**Caution:** by different “styles” I don’t mean that one person can be dressed in a fancy dress and another in denim. Pick a style, from casual to formal, and stay within the same feeling. Decide as a family if you want to all look like you are going to church, or going to a barbeque, and then look for palettes that coordinate.

How to do this *without being a professional stylist*? Even if you hate shopping, here are some tips to help you pick out clothing choices that will work for your personality:

**TIP #1! Use Pinterest as a guide, not the rule.**

Pinterest is a social site that acts like your own personal cut-and-paste “bulletin board.” In the past to gather ideas for inspiration, you might have clipped ideas out of magazines, and taped them into a book or pinned them onto a bulletin board. There is now an internet version of the same method. “Pinterest” allows you to “pin” any photo that you find while roaming the net, and save it to an “interest board.” Categorizing different ideas this way, you find and gather all kinds of things that you can refer to later when you need them. Most users incorporate this idea for a) recipes they find and like, b) travel photos of places they are hoping to visit, c) fashion ideas, d) weight-loss ideas, e) makeup ideas, f) art inspiration, and g) *for planning a portrait*, to show your photographer ideas you found online that you like, and h) *planning what to wear for your portrait*. Caution: please don’t treat Pinterest as ideas to simply copy, but as inspiration, and also follow the other rules in this chapter.

**How Pinterest Works**

If you are not computer savvy, save some time and have a friend who loves the internet help you with this, but in summary, it works like this: get a Pinterest.com account. Now create a category called “family photo ideas,” Google search “family photos,” find things that you like and “pin” them to the board. Now create a category called “family outfit ideas,” within your Pinterest account and Google search for “family photo fashion” or “casual clothing solid colors,” or “formal family outfits.” See what you can find, and pin things that you like from other people’s pins. Now you have a reference gathered for when you go shopping, and you can hone in on just those things when browsing racks of clothes, and hopefully save yourself a lot of time in the store hunting for things that not only work with your color scheme, but will have the fashion and style that resonates with your different personalities.

At The Imagery we have already gathered Pinterest ideas for our clients, as well as PDFs of photos with clothing combo ideas, but it is impossible to come up with something that is all-inclusive. The options, especially when you don’t limit yourself to “matchy matchy” are limitless. We share Pinterest ideas from all over the internet, not just photos from our studio. The idea is to expand your typical thinking to beyond your everyday wardrobe, and help you to think in terms of what will look best together as a grouping for the finished photo.

**TIP #2! Hire someone to plan your clothes for you.**

If you are not technically savvy, or simply don't have the time, you may want to consider investing in a professional wardrobe stylist to help you create a collection of ideas. This is not as intimidating as it may sound, and stylists are more accessible today with various options for anyone's budget. A stylist will take you a step beyond the general information and tips that a photographer will supply. Stylists are pros and get to know your body type and your skin type, and help you select things that will work best specifically for you and your family. This can be invaluable if you struggle with your own wardrobe, much less getting everyone coordinated for a portrait that will last for generations, hanging on the wall. You can go as far as having them shop for you, or you can have them come to your closet and pick out clothes, or simply have them do a consult over the phone. We work with a stylist that gives our clients an exclusive discount for working with her. Your photographer might have the same offering, or do an internet search for “wardrobe stylists” in your area.

**Rule #2**

The old adages of, “Keep it simple,” and “Less is more,” apply in planning clothing for the family portrait. The expression on your face is the star of the show, *not the clothes*. Even though we say “layer and texture” for a photograph, you still want to keep things fairly simple where no one person might have been trying too hard and “over-dressed,” versus someone else in the group. Layers can flatter, but they can also add bulk if done in the wrong way. Look at the clothes in a full-length mirror. Does what you're wearing widen your body anywhere? Are you leading your eye to an area that you want it to go, or drawing our attention down into the clothes rather up to your face?

**Rule #3**

Solids vs. plaids and stripes. However, do not “matchy match” (see rule #1), but keep to solid colors on each person. If you layer, and we often suggest that you do, you can add slightly darker or slightly lighter shades from the same color to add depth and interest, i.e., add a scarf, add a jacket or vest, place a tee underneath the sweater or shirt. Moms are usually better at this than dads, so be sure to pre-plan, and you might have to shop a little bit to add dad's "layers." You don't want the body to flatten and widen, which can happen if you are wearing just one color and one layer.

**“But Mom, this is so not ‘us’”**

**Rule #4**

Make a clear decision on *how you want to “be,”* and get on the same page with everyone in your group. In other words, as I cautioned earlier, decide on casual vs. formal. Now that you've have a color scheme in mind that you love, are you going to show a playful side of your personalities or perhaps you want to have a setting where we show everyone at their most “stately” in a portrait—then make it consistent throughout everyone in the group. You achieve beautiful results either way. Portraits can be done with formal tuxedos on the men and ball gowns on the women, and the result is a timeless look that gives you an old-

mansion traditional feel of the portraits done in stately homes of Europe since the dawn of portraiture. On the flip side, maybe it’s a fun portrait for your family room, and every time you look at it you want to smile and laugh seeing the casual interaction of your family. In that case, everyone in jeans and different tops (within the same color palette) would be more appropriate.

**Caution!** Don’t take this step lightly and just say, “casual,” or “formal.” If you want to do either, everyone in the family must be prepared to tell the same story and look and be completely on board as to how they will act in the photo session itself. Too often everyone is dressed in jeans, and then dad in khakis and a button-down shirt, and the dad doesn’t match the rest of the clan. Conversely, everyone is dressed formally, but one of the men doesn’t have a tuxedo, or doesn’t own a tie, and he is the only male in the photograph just in a dress shirt. Don’t let anyone in your family “stick out,” or they will always be drawing the focus of the viewer—and that member of the family will always hate you for putting that photo on the wall. Keep the peace. Plan accordingly, and rent a tux if you have to, or go and buy someone jeans and a casual shirt so he or she looks part of the family. The extra effort will be well worth it.

### **But Mom, “Who Cares??”**

#### **Rule #5**

Think beyond your lifespan. This can be the hardest rule the younger you are. Teens seldom think beyond their next grade in school. Clearly decide on your “story” and what this will mean for future generations. If planned properly, this portrait could have a “wall life” that is well beyond the lifespan of you and your immediate family. Archival papers and canvas are meant to last for hundreds of years. You certainly want to invest in something to leave behind that you not only enjoy now, but that future generations will enjoy. Much like preparing a Will, you need to get clear on what you want to leave behind.

When you think of how future generations will be enjoying your portraits, they will probably use a gift size (4x6 – 8x10) in a much different manner than a wall size. Smaller-size portraits that you do for bookcases and shelving are designed for a closer-in crop, showing smiles and facial features facing the camera. Future generations will enjoy these miniature portraits for their “face” value. In other words, they want to know exactly what you looked like and how you are related to them, and they can enjoy these little antique expressions in cute frames, and hang them with other generations of photos in a cluster, or set them on bookcases for decoration. Keep your clothing timeless, but your expression in these closer-in shots can be smiling and full of “life.”

Imagine a hundred years from now a future grandchild showing their child what “features” they inherited from their great-grandparents. What fun! Trendy clothing could even be a fun novelty when you order a smaller-size print.

Larger prints are used and enjoyed differently. Thinking beyond your lifespan comes into play especially when you are seeking a larger wall hanging to become the focal point of a room. What will future generations do with this same wall hanging? Cropped at farther

distances, showing full length and  $\frac{3}{4}$  perspective (see terms in Chapter 2), for larger portraits hung in frames or canvas on the wall, would have to be, for the future generation, enjoyed as a piece of artwork that stands on its own. Let’s imagine a larger wall portrait over a fireplace or couch for a moment. Stretch your mind into the future. Imagine a family, not your own, smiling straight at you in your living room. Would you enjoy that? Usually the answer would be “No.” It’s probably not going to happen. Your portrait will be tossed and perhaps the frame preserved or wind up in an antique store (if you invested in a proper frame). I’m not suggesting that you never have a smiley portrait of your family, however, it’s something to be aware of that the “wall life” might be longer of something that is not “smiley” and shows more about the emotion and the thought behind the eyes.

My grandparents had a non-smiling portrait of a single family member, in turn-of-the-century dress, that hung alone over the piano. It was at least a thirty-inch-high print, and after my grandparents’ death, my mother now has the print in her home, and someday I will probably want to inherit that print as well, despite the fact that I no longer have any idea who this person is beyond that fact that somehow he is related to me. Thank goodness this person was not “smiling” at us, or I would have been creeped out because the print was quite large. Instead, I enjoy the stately manner in which the subject sits. I enjoy thinking about the time he lived in, his clothing, the expressions behind his eyes, and the features of his face. It can be enjoyed long after the actual person in the photograph is remembered. It is now a work of portrait art, an heirloom.

SIDE NOTE: If you want future generations to know “who these people are,” you need to leave a note printed on the back. Don’t hide it in the frame like a treasure to be found by someone in an antique store, but have it visible so that whenever the print is removed and future generations look at the back, the story of that picture can be told. Don’t only put names either, as future generations need to know more than just the name, and also something about them. It might look something like this: “This is a portrait of Joe Smith Jr., son of Anna and Robert Smith, father of Kitty and Daisy. Joe was a blacksmith for the xyz company and a lay preacher for his church at St. Anthony’s Episcopal in St. Paul on Cleveland St. Joe was active in the Masons and loved archery. He was also a fine singer in the choir.” This would have been very helpful with several old photographs in our family’s possession, and leaves many helpful clues for someone who might want to dig even deeper into their history and understand where their family came from.

So what are the types of *wall* portraits (generally 14 inches and greater) that will last through the generations?

- A) Portraits where the subjects are smiling, but *not directly at the camera* (or out into the relative’s living room),
- b) Portraits that show interaction that is not facing the camera, but instead interaction with one another, and
- c) Portraits that do look straight at the camera, but with a stately, pleasant expression (no smiley teeth).

If you choose something like this from your photo session, it could be, if you wished it to, something that can be enlarged within anyone’s home, no matter the

generation, and it is now more than a moment in time for your family. These types of portraits will become pieces of art from your own family history.

**But Mom, “We don’t have anywhere to put something like that!”**

**Rule #6**

You must decide where that portrait will be hung. Your decision can change, but you should decide in advance. Even if you will be moving soon, you still have similar rooms and furniture that it will go with. If a large portrait is something you desire, you will find a spot for it, even if you might have to remove that illustration of a bowl of fruit. As I described in “deciding on your ‘story’” in Part 1 of this book, it is also important to think about the mood of the room where it will hang.

That stately portrait described earlier, of the gentleman in my grandparents’ house, is hung above the piano in the living-room, and because of its formal style, it would seem out of place in their basement rec-room. However, if the man was in a portrait shown playing with or hugging his children, not looking at the camera, and dressed ‘casually’ for the day, it might very well be something to be enjoyed in a TV room or recreational room. The room where you are planning on hanging the portrait will give you a really good direction on explaining to a photographer what you want the portrait to end up “feeling” like. Nothing is more disappointing than having a client create a beautiful portrait, meant to be enlarged, and they say, “We don’t have anywhere to put something like that.” Instead, it is really, “We don’t have anywhere to put an expression like that, so we need to pick out a different expression.” Believe me, there is always a room, but if we didn’t nail the proper expression, it is possible that you will not have a place for it.

**Now you know the rules...it’s time to call the photographer  
and let him know what decisions you have made.**

If you have thought about the six rules above, then you will be ready to answer the questions that your photographer wants answered prior to your session in order to create a proper plan. Here are your five main questions:

**Question #1:**

What will you do with your portraits after you have purchased them? (see Part 1 of this book, i.e., digital social sharing and printing on your own, wall portrait (large or small), a focal point of a room, gift portraits, albums, *all of the above?*). *Tip:* Now that you are clear from Part 1 of the book, of why you are taking the portrait, and all the terminology and uses, you need to make your own list of all your possible uses and rooms where it might be hung. Your list should also include a gift list for relatives that might like portraits of your family. The answer helps the photographer develop a plan for shooting, as well as a budget and ideas of what items to tell you about when it comes to the sale.

**Question #2:**

What will you be wearing? The answer helps the photographer to plan an appropriate background or location that goes with your style. Reminder: prepare by laying out ideas on

the floor or on top of a bed. If one of the pieces really sticks out from the others, replace it because it will also stick out in the portrait.

**Note:** Even if you decide that you want a black-and-white, or sepia-toned portrait, clothing will still be a factor and needs to follow the general rules. Plaids, stripes, and colors that are in high contrast to one another, instead of within a “palette,” will still cause one person to stand out more from the others, even if the portrait is turned to a monotone like black and white or sepia (see terms).

**Question #3:**

Casual or Formal? What expressions will you be seeking to tell your story? The answer helps the photographer prepare a proper background, lighting and posing situation. Often the answer to casual or formal also dictates the style of clothing, so you will answer this in question #2. Pinterest can be a great tool for inspiration, or you may want to invest in a professional stylist.

**Question #4:**

Is this something to last for generations as heirloom art? The answer helps the photographer know whether you will be looking for artwork in the larger portrait shots that will be more timeless than a “smile straight to camera” and what kind of shots to frame for smaller gift sizes.

**Question #5:**

Where will the portrait hang in your home? Along with question #4, the answer lets the photographer know what style and expression you are seeking. If you are able to give him specific measurements ahead of time, this might let him also know whether you need to fill a space with a vertical portrait or a landscape orientation, which makes a huge difference in how he will compose the portrait and how it is cropped.

Instead of the five, more important, questions above, clients typically ask the following questions when preparing for a portrait. Some of these questions can be answered on your own now that you are reading this book.

- 1) **What should I wear?** (Answer: No need to go over this one again.. it was covered in this chapter, but you see how many other questions need to be answered before you can answer what you are going to wear? Your photographer will not be able to answer this question for you, at least fully, it is something you have to develop together as a family, and the tools in this book help you to do that.)
- 2) **My family doesn't want a portrait, but I do...** (Answer: see part 1 for getting over their objections.)
- 3) **I don't like how I look right now, can I wait for that bonus family session after I've lost xyz number of pounds?** The one thing that doesn't change is we are not getting any younger with time. Of course we can extend specials and bonuses until you are 'ready', but many photographers (ourselves included) are skilled in posing, lighting, and Photoshop, and we make sure that the finished portrait will have you looking your absolute best... that includes things that we do behind the scenes to make you 10-20 pounds lighter. Answer: Don't sweat it; get it done.

- 4) **What does it cost?** This question is so common, and always has to make us laugh. “What do pictures cost?” is like going into a grocery store and asking someone in the aisle, not the check out, “What will I pay today for groceries?” We are forced to answer your question with another question, “What is in your shopping cart?” Hopefully by doing the homework and understanding the rules and questions. Answer: you will have a clear “shopping cart” after reading this book, and can instead ask the photographer what specific items cost that you are looking for.
- 5) **What time of day should I have my session?** Sometimes clients tell us they want to have their session at a certain time that is just not practical for the poses and backgrounds they are desiring. Yes, we could do it, but the photographer has to answer other things first before the “what time of day.” Here are the three things that you will be asked before a time is picked, “How many people are in your group? What ages? Where do we want to have the portrait done?”

Let me break down why these three questions are important.

1) **“How many people are in your group?”** followed by,

2) **“Where do you want your photo taken?”** If you have more than three in a group, and the photograph is outside, then the photographer will be suggesting a time of day that has less natural lighting challenges, i.e., the sun is not at a high point in the sky which causes harsh shadows. There are ways to work around this. A photographer might carry equipment that over-powers the sun, and equipment and assistants that block and create shade, however the larger the group becomes, the less practical this becomes. Photographers prefer not to go through all the extra work if it can be avoided. Natural, “soft” light is best towards the end of the day, or in some cases, at sunrise (but families are unlikely to want to get up early, and the photographer may not work those types of hours, so end of day becomes more practical).

3) **“What are the ages?”** All of the above might be completely null and void if we have children under age eight who are not at their best during a certain time of day. Getting the right expression is more important than getting the perfect light. It is also more important than going with a time that is “convenient to the adults.” Adult’s schedules are easy to adjust; children’s temper-clocks are not. If young children are included, the photographer should ask, “When are the kids at their best?” They *should not ask*, “When are you available to come in?” Early morning and just after nap time and eating are the best times to bring young children into the picture. Also, children under the age of 2 might be distracted outside, and if the family portrait consists mainly of children all under the age of eight, an indoor option is probably more appropriate.

The family portrait is one of the noblest things that you can do for yourselves and for the future historians of your clan—so it is worth it to make it a successful experience with proper preparation.

Remember, the most important questions to ask are not about price, clothing, or time of day... but rather:

- ✓ “What story am I telling about us as a family?”



- ✓ “What are we celebrating?”
- ✓ “What will I do with my pictures once I have them?”
- ✓ “What room(s) will my portraits live in?”
- ✓ “What future wall-life might they have for other generations?”

**Answer those questions *first*, and then the decisions  
that you thought were most important, like cost, clothing, and scheduling,  
will all fall into place.**

### **Be Prepared for What to Expect**

In part 1, I outlined different types of photographers. The experience you may have will vary based on which type of photographer you choose for your needs. No rules exist that require photographers to give you a certain type of experience from beginning to end, so I can only describe our experience for those that are looking into the “entrepreneur” professional. Please know, however, that just because a photographer is under what I call “entrepreneurial professional,” does not mean that they will have a similar experience outlined for their clients. We all can be quite different despite our similar goals in providing a professional service that is our sole source of income.

*Your experience at our Imagery Photography Studio...*

First of all, thank you, for reading this book and doing your homework. It means that your experience will be extremely enhanced. You and the photographer will be on exactly the same page as to what to do. If you were coming into our *Imagery* studio, the photographer (Rod, my husband) would always re-ask all the preparatory questions ahead of time, just in case, and to refresh his memory as well, but usually there is just time for one big question, “Did you have anything particular in mind?”

And now, the answer is, “Why yes, I read the book *Prepare for your Perfect Portrait*, and I can tell you exactly what I have in mind. Rod will want to hug and kiss you at this point, but he’ll resist the temptation if it’s your first time working together.

At our studio, we always greet you in a special, customized way—like a sign out front with your name, and your name at the dressing room door. If children are coming, we are prepared with treats after the session, candy, with permission, or stickers and a toy. Pets are welcome too, and we love to work on their smiles. Just let us know if they are motivated by treats, and whether they have any allergies. We provide treats and the squeaky toys. You always want to let your photographer know in advance if the photo includes children under eight, or pets. It’s kind of the same preparation for both, only with kids, we want them to be well rested and well fed, and pets we want to be tired and slightly hungry

During your session expect the photographer to move smoothly and quickly between different expressions and posing of groups. We know that various members of your group have different degrees of enthusiasm of participation, but the goal is that everyone have a relaxed and stress-free time, enjoying each other’s company and feeling comfortable enough to open up for different expressions. Each grouping should have a “quiet” expression, a partial smile, a bigger smile, and a full-on happiness expression of

joy that strives to be “over-the-top,” such as a “hey everybody, now hug together and squeeze real tight.”

Why would we want to get all of these different expressions if you had already told the photographer that you want, in the end, a large wall portrait that is playful and interactive, or just quiet and introspective? We still want to give you a variety of expressions to choose from, because at the end of the day, even if we know the “big one” will have a certain look, people always find other needs for portraits around the house and for family. Often the Christmas card, for example, is a much different look than the expression above the fireplace, and we want to give you as many options as possible, with efficient and seamless, repeatable style.

When you return for your next family session, you should be able to expect much of the same type of service, but even smoother because you now know more about what to expect.

### **The Ordering Process**

So you have had a wonderful session, now what? Of course, it is time to order.

Here is where photographers differ even more than in the experience of the session: How to go about getting paid for their work. Let’s break it down with the three types of photographers again so you know what to expect AFTER the photo session in three main scenarios.

- **The Hobbyist Order**

Expect it to be very simple. After the session, maybe you will have one price for a set of items, or one price for the CD of everything. When to expect the CD will vary. Check ahead if you need something right away, as sometimes the hobbyist will like to go over the images and prepare certain ones in Photoshop or Lightroom (editing programs for photographers) before they end up giving you all the images. You are paying them like a hobbyist, so they may have another job that supports them, and you are not their highest priority.

- **The Artist Order**

The artist is not likely to hand over all the images if she is more conscious about how each image looks as a work of art. It could take some time to get a CD, and at that point, it probably would be a matter of charging per image for her artwork. Artists will vary greatly in price and in timing of delivery. The artist might give you one or two options in which she does a finished product for you, to absolute perfection, in her style. Again, price and delivery will vary greatly depending on the artist, and you have probably chosen her for that particular look and that particular end product that only she can do. Expect longer delivery time as a general rule, also expect higher end-product options, and maybe even no “low-end” product options available as an option.

- **The Entrepreneur Order... *The Imagery Photography Studio***

I will explain our system; however, don’t expect your session to be exactly like this for every entrepreneur professional.

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After the session we will set up a viewing appointment, usually a week after the family session. At the viewing and ordering appointment, we project your images onto a screen on the wall, and they can be cropped to the size that you would order for your wall at home. You have the option of sending us images of your own walls, so we can actually project photos in a program that allows you to see what your photos would look like on your walls at home.

Our pricing is a la carte, and includes options for ordering digital images, but digital images rarely come into play, since we provide complete printing and post-production for you.

Once you order, expect 4–6 weeks for delivery, depending on the type of products ordered. Canvas and albums tend to take longer than standard finish prints and gift sizes.

**Our goal is to always under-promise—and over-deliver.**

Expect to receive various bonuses for ordering at different price levels, and referral bonuses for sending friends our way. Rewards for ordering above certain amounts or buying particular items are offered as bonuses. You are told about a variety of product options that you might never have thought of previously, as entrepreneurs and marketers are constantly on the lookout for new items, and new ways to add to your order and experience.

**Delivery of the Order**

With professionals, you have paid for a service, and you should always be able to have that service guaranteed. But with the three types of photographers, and no industry standard, it's better to be safe and check with the photographer before booking your session. Simply ask whether they have a policy on guaranteeing their work and the final order—and what it is.

If you are unhappy for any reason, at our studio we have what is called a “Happiness Guarantee,” and you are able to request a re-shoot, a re-print of the product (usually if there is a problem with corrective re-touching), or, a complete refund.

**At The Imagery, we don't want anyone walking away feeling they are settling for anything less than 100% satisfaction.**

Smart entrepreneurs are working to surprise and delight you, and they are learning and improving, as we have, through customer feedback. Don't be afraid to leave your professional photographer with suggestions on how he can do even better for you in the future.

**CHAPTER 8**

## High School Senior Session

“When I graduated from Santa Monica High in 1927, I was voted the girl most likely to succeed. I didn't realize it would take so long.”

– Gloria Stuart

When preparing for your high school senior session, it's important to first be clear and excited about your “why.” Why do you want Senior Pictures? An ever-increasing number of people are asking this question, and it baffles me because it used to be a given and a rite of passage, at least in our geographic area. Now it seems that more and more parents and students alike are questioning the need. Before we delve into your “why you should,” let's explore and understand the other side of things, and delve into “why” some people think you “shouldn't.”

It used to be that the yearbook photo was the only photo that you left behind as your legacy and connection to others in your class. The yearbook was that one thing that you would refer to at reunions, and that one thing that people would sign at the end of the school year to remember you by, because you would probably never see many of these people again, ever. That was how it used to be.

Today we have social media accounts that keep us connected, whether we like it or not, with everyone from our past, present and future. On these accounts, hundreds of photos that are often taken daily, record every moment that you decide is worth recording, from the mundane to the spectacular, and usually positive, so you might get a false sense that everyone's life is so much rosier and more exciting than yours. In fact, insecurity among teens that we see in the studio is at an all-time high. It is the generation that is constantly connected—and disconnected at the same time (but that is another topic). So, some might think of the yearbook as a nice thing, but not an absolute must-have. A couple of years ago we began to hear parents and students talking about how they weren't going to get a yearbook because, “It's too expensive, and they never look at it anyway.” This would have been unheard of before Facebook really started to take hold, less than ten years ago.

### “Wallet, what's a wallet?”

Try explaining a *wallet* to a seventeen-year-old these days, and you will get a blank stare. Once I had a student go through a whole order, constantly saying to his mom who was ordering wallets for herself, “I don't need that, why do I need that.” We discovered the whole time he was thinking that by “wallet” I meant the thing that holds money, and he had no idea that it was a 2”x3” print. (see terms in Part 1: Chapter 2) Most of their young lives, their parents stored photos on a phone, not in their pocket, and they have gone through all of their high school years without receiving the gift of a wallet. Who needs to have a physical photo of their friends...they have that online! The wallet-sized photos used to be what all high school seniors waited patiently to receive from their photographer, in multiple poses, and by the dozens each. Our top-seller wallet package was 3 poses of 48 wallets each, and it wasn't uncommon for 5 poses of 48 each. Now it's 1 pose of 8, and that's all the parent

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wants for maybe those people that a) aren’t online, and b) relatives and friends that they forgot or don’t need a 4x6 or larger.

In response to a lower demand for *wallets*, we now treat social media files like printed wallets on our price list. We either charge for the social sharing file, or give it away free as a bonus if they actually do purchase a wallet-sized print. We also provide a mobile app (see terms Chapter 2).

### **“We don’t display family pictures on our walls.”**

If you haven’t been ordering school photos, for the reasons listed above, it’s hard to change the habit. If you grew up in an environment where you never took a professional photo, and you never saw that on the wall, it’s easy to say, “Why start now?” or “If I need to be reminded of what they look like, I can just scroll through my phone,” and, “Why start now just because it’s Senior Year?”

I hear a number of excuses for not ordering professional photos of kids, but probably the most common justification is “wall space.” In truth, families that say, “we have no wall space,” are forgetting that they do have walls. If I visited your home, I would find wall space—so I’m sure it’s not really about that; rather it goes back to what you are used to and comfortable with.

The second most common justification about walls I hear is “that’s not what we do.” A few have said, “My interior designer says that family photos shouldn’t be displayed on the first floor.” I challenge this line of thinking. Putting a picture of family and kids on a wall does one of two things: 1) you send a message that family is important to you, in a public area of the home where others will see, or 2) you send a message that family is important to you, in a private space of your home, where you will be personally reminded how much you love your kids—a reminder to both you and your children of that love that’s out front for them and others to see

The conversation with guests in your home often centers around positive stories of your kids. If you have no photos of family, then stories might center around the parent and the visitor’s lives, and not circle back to the kids. Imagine the difference between, “Oh, what a beautiful Terry Redland print you have,” versus “Oh, what a beautiful portrait. Is that your son?” Now imagine where these two conversations will lead, and now imagine your kids over-hearing the conversation. What’s the difference in how they will feel?

### **It’s Time to Start a New (Old) Tradition**

Okay, so you haven’t “done pictures” with a professional, yet. You may not have any albums to look back on of your past when you were growing up, or any professional portraits that your parents had taken when you were little. You may not have photos of your grandparents, or great grandparents—and maybe you don’t miss that, maybe it doesn’t matter to you that this type of photographic history just doesn’t exist in your family, so far. Why not change that for future generations when it comes to Senior Year?

I can’t convince you of something being important when you don’t think it is, but try to imagine this: Your great-grandchild is looking at the portrait you had taken by a professional (it will be on archival paper and professionally mounted and preserved), and

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saying, “Wow, that is so cool how people looked and dressed back then, and I can see where I get my eyes/ears/nose from... .” Instead of thinking of what it is “you” want from the portrait, try to instead imagine what story you’d like to leave behind for “them” when you are long gone from this earth. Now imagine that you had more than one photo, one sharing what you did as a profession, one sharing something of your passion and something you excelled at, one showing off the style of the day, maybe a formal suit or prom dress, and one showing off what you looked like every day going to school. Imagine what stories your photo could tell about who, what and why you existed at that time in high school.

And that is why we do what we do.

Have you established your “Why” for Senior Pictures yet? If so, you are ready to prepare for the session.

### **Questions People Ask**

As with family photos, common questions for senior session have to do with 1) clothing, 2) timing and 3) cost, but, as with family photos, these are not the most important things. First we must establish the type of pictures you want, and determine what you are going to do with them. More than the details on clothing, it has to do with what story you want to tell. Timing is also not a factor as much as it is for groups, since with a single subject in the photograph a professional will be able to manipulate outdoor light when appropriate and therefore be very flexible as to when the photo is taken. At The Imagery, Rod works with an assistant outdoors that helps him set up proper lighting in any given space and time of day.

And finally, cost is a greater variable and handled in multitudes of different ways by different photographers. People ask: “How much do photos cost?” As in family pictures, we don’t know until we know what you have in your shopping cart of ideas. To assist you in developing your wish list for your order, I’ll give you questions to ask so you set yourself up for the right expectation, and helpful things to know when searching for a photographer that will work within your budget.

Now that we are over the “clothing, timing and cost” questions...it’s time to think about:

### **Questions People *Should* Ask**

#### **• What story do you want to tell about yourself, for friends now, and for family in the future?**

When planning for your senior portrait, think of different aspects of yourself. Some examples, but not all inclusive are: a studious side, a playful side, a musical side, a sporty side, a glamorous side, a casual side, a geeky side, a superhero side, and on and on. Now, how would you show these different aspects of yourself? What clothing and props would you bring into the picture?

Think of gathering clothing (some ideas), and pick something you would wear:

- Every day, a favorite outfit or two outfits that show different moods
- For your activity or interest you excel at (include appropriate props)
- For a dressy event (i.e., homecoming, prom)
- To show your alter-ego or a super-hero story-side of you

General rules to go by:

- Solids versus plaids and stripes. As in family clothing choices, you can pick things that are layered, and within the same color family and hue, but try not to go with something of high contrast within the same outfit. For example, don't wear a white top and black pants because it's better to go with an outfit that is all lightly colored, or all darkly colored, so your face will have more of the center stage instead of your clothes.
- Layers. Be careful that you don't add bulk, but layering with a jacket, vest, scarf, under-shirt are things that can all add dimension to the portrait, as well as clothing that has texture, like knit sweaters and lace tops.
- Think of your winter and fall wardrobe. Don't come dressed all in summer. In fact, we recommend long sleeves and covered knees. Any amount of skin other than the face detracts, but sometimes you want to break the rules and guys look fine in a t-shirt, and girls in a spaghetti strapped sundress. Be aware that your arms are going draw more attention in the portrait, so if you don't like your arms, cover them up or consider layering with a scarf or jacket.
- Don't forget to dress “head to toe.” Although shoes will not be seen in most of your photographs, for a few shots the photographer pulls back to full length. Be sure to bring along shoes that go with each of your outfits, and also shoes that don't attract all the attention. (Exceptions to this rule is when a high school senior is particularly fond of their shoes, and we actually want to highlight their style in a portrait). Pay attention that your nails are groomed, and if your toes are going to show, pay attention to your pedicure. Your hair should not be cut less than two weeks before a session, to give it time to grow in and have you comfortable and used to the styling. Girls can have hair professionally “set” in a blow out or curl prior to their session if an appointment with a stylist is made ahead of time. Be careful to arrange plenty of time with your stylist, and let them know when you have to be ready to leave for your session.
- Girls: Be sure to pack undergarments and accessories that match each outfit. Certain tops and dresses might require bras of lighter or darker color, or a slip might be needed, so pack all of these things ahead of time in separate garment bags so you are hunting for items, or so you don't forget items in your haste to make it to your session on time.
- Guys: Yes, baseball caps are fun to wear, but wait until the last outfit, and arrive at the studio without a hat, to avoid “hat head” when the session first starts. If you would like to do a stubble look and a clean-shaven look with different outfits, let us know so time can be added on to the session for shaving in the middle.

• **What accomplishments are you celebrating?**

With high school seniors, it's not only the accomplishment of making it through 12 years of education, it's about what you might have become known for or devoted to for those years. This does not have to mean the typical extracurricular activities like sports, drama or music, it can go beyond that to “leadership,” “science,” “foreign languages and travel.” The key is communicating with your photographer what your passions are, and then coming up with creative ways in which to share those passions through images. Some trends, in particular with the “artist” photographers, are where a particular creative style is chosen for you, but

you should be able to have a collaborative, creative session with a photographer that will bring about images that are particular to your interests and strengths. Sometimes we have seniors whose favorite thing is video games, and they really don't have any other passions. Great, because we can portray video games. We've laid the entire upstairs camera room out with monitors, games and bags of half-empty snacks, and we put the senior up in a chair with their remote devices, playing on the 60" screen. A good plan can make anything happen; you just have to let the photographer know.

Another example would be a kid that works most of his time during high school, who had a job at the movie theatre. Perfect! We had them come in with their work uniform, and popcorn from the theatre, and decorated the background like curtains at a multi-plex. And voila, we had fun, with instant and unlimited posing possibilities. Because the session was planned ahead of time, the student also brought in one of the large cardboard movie displays of a giant dinosaur. Brilliant!

You don't have to be the starting quarterback or the lead cheerleader to come up with an outfit to show your “extra” personality and story of high school. Every kid has something that is unique to them that they love above all else. We've photographed stuffed animal collectors, book worms, anime enthusiasts, you name it. And of course we still work the traditional band student, or sports stars. Don't be shy, go all the way with it, and bring in your entire uniform, and your instrument. Let the photographer use all that he can to work with, and bring about a creative piece that really shines.

• **What will you do with your portraits once you have them?**

A number of products are available now that go steps above the typical package that you get with your yearly school picture ID photo. When it comes to senior picture time, be aware that, for this one special year, you get to have possibly the finest and only individual portrait of you before you are married. And because it is a special year, there are more items to choose from than there would be in your yearly “school photo” portrait package.

Look back on Part 2: Chapter 1 for family photos, and determine the room or rooms where this high school senior wall portrait could be hung. Even if you have multiple children that will be seniors, a set of 11x14 or 16x20 next to each other can fill a focal point a room and will not be over-powering. A larger portrait, like 20x24, 20x30 and above, need spaces all their own, and we would suggest a high-ceiling entryway up a staircase, or a fireplace or couch area. The larger 24–30 inch prints are most often ordered when you have only 1 to 3 kids, versus 4 and 5. If you have multiple children, an option that might work for you is perhaps a large family portrait, updated each year there is a senior photo, and putting the senior photos as smaller prints surrounding the larger family grouping.

In addition to the wall portrait, consider an album because of the different looks you tend to get with high school senior sessions, especially if the senior is going to be doing multiple outfits with the photographer. It varies from home to home, but typically you will be selecting only one or two wall groupings, and after that, you'll still have many favorites from a session that will be left un-ordered (at our studio an average of 50 favorites) that could be put into some sort of proof set or album (see terms Part 1: Chapter 2).



After the album, it’s time to think about gifts for relatives. The reason why the photographer has hopefully taken all kinds of shots, both close in and full length, is because there will always be a need for a closer-in shot for family gifts. In our experience, *the grandparents tend to like things close in and see you smiling*. Keep a list of the number of family members you have that will want smaller copies. Plan ahead of time with your photographer for budgeting, and for determining what special requests and preferences family members might have for the kind of photo they would like to have. Some photographers might have more expense for each separate pose that you order, plus retouching each pose—and some photographers will keep these extra charges hidden and off of their published price list. It is prudent to give them a complete list of what you were thinking of ordering so they can give you a more detailed answer for planning costs ahead of time.

Once you’ve made a list of relatives and their needs, anyone you might have forgotten probably would be happy with a wallet (2.5” x 3”). Wallets are usually priced in sets of 4 and sets of 8 per pose, but that will vary from photographer to photographer. Another option is custom-made grad cards that include the senior’s photo. We can create grad cards, or graduation announcements, with multiple photos on them, and we start from a template, but develop something custom from there. Other photographers might have you strictly pick a template, or order the digital file for creating your own card off websites. The grad card can be an announcement of graduation, an open house invite, or both.

Items that you might not have considered (because you aren’t used to ordering them for your annual school photo) are: collages, slideshows, photo boxes, custom photo CD covers, mobile phone covers, key chains for their car. We put in these ideas as bonuses with larger orders, but they can also be purchased a la carte.

When it comes time for the grad party, you will have not only have a beautiful wall portrait that you could set out on an easel, but you might also have a collage—all those poses you just gave away to relatives could be made as a grouping and hung as a single piece on the wall—an album, a slideshow, extra wallets spread out on tables, and a photo sign-in book for guests. Outside on the garage you could have a banner with the senior’s photos and congratulations, and leading up to the house there could be yard signs with the photos. When it comes to senior pictures, it’s time to have a lot of fun and think outside the “8x10.”

• **How will your portraits be enjoyed over time through different generations?**

Long after the small prints and the grad party décor is gone, the larger wall portrait should be just like the family photo that will last and you won’t tire of in time. Think of the portrait displayed on the wall as a piece of art. The album, with all the different fun variety of the session, will be a true heirloom piece that your senior can pass on from generation to generation. The album really tells the whole story of the person at that age, giving the viewer an insight to all their different personalities and interests.

**Tips for your high school senior session**

Some additional things to think about when preparing:

- 1) Gather ideas (Pinterest Board) far in advance so you can think about the rules and tips about clothing reviewed earlier, and shop to fill any missing holes for telling your overall story, as well as gather props that might be needed. Many times we

schedule a session around when the new letter jacket will become available, for example, but in some cases we can schedule the majority of the session, and then have the senior come back for a special outfit that wasn't ready yet.

- 2) Pack ahead of time, and in separate garment bags. By placing everything in a separate bag, you will be able to observe what is needed for undergarments, shoes and accessories for each outfit, and be able to take them out quickly and efficiently during your session so you waste little time in the dressing room. The less time spent changing clothes—the more time in front of the camera.
- 3) Follow the what-to-wear tips earlier in this chapter, considering all your different personalities and interests. Don't bring in the same type of clothes, just in different colors, because that tells nothing “new” about you from outfit to outfit. You want each outfit to be a completely different feel and style. Also, remember your fall and winter wardrobe. Even though it may be summer outside, your longer sleeves and sweaters will provide variety between outfits, as well as covering your arms and legs so that your face is the “star” of the photo.
- 4) Create a shopping list of what photos you want for you and for your family. This helps the photographer to properly inform you of a budget and to also suggest other items that you might not have thought of before.
- 5) Get lots of sleep the night before. Do not plan a party or go to a sleepover or stay up all night doing video games or movie watching. Tired eyes and mind are visible in photographs!
- 6) Come with an open mind and a good attitude. The photographer can capture only what he is able to draw out of you. No matter what the mood that day, or the bickering that might have happened in the car before you came, try to put all that aside and assume that you are going to have a good time. An unwilling subject is hard to get relaxed and to collaborate on pictures that will last for generations to come. A positive attitude at the beginning can mean all the difference in creating the magic.

### **What will the experience be like?**

My favorite high school senior story is one about a mom who relayed to me how her daughter felt after her session. Usually a mom will say things like, “You made my son/daughter feel so special, they loved it, they had a much better time than they thought they would,” but I'll never forget this one time, when a mom brought in daughter number two, and she was all concerned at first. You see the first daughter was a cheerleader, popular, and your “traditional beauty”. This second daughter was not “traditional” and was used to the older sister getting all the accolades of being beautiful. Mom warned us ahead of time that taking her picture may be difficult, as she didn't really want to be there at all. Then we found out, that when mom was taking her home in the car after the ordering appointment, after seeing only pictures of her, again and again on the screen, she said to mom, “I never realized this before, but I guess I really *am* kind of pretty.” This was someone who came to her session hiding behind white-girl dreadlocks and piercings and not feeling “beautiful,” and we embraced her special and different look, and what were some of the

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most beautiful eyes I have ever seen. In deed, she was even more photogenic than her “pretty” sister. But it all comes down to the experience. Rod was able to have her feeling comfortable and, most importantly “pretty.” I usually cry when clients tell me stories like that, and I definitely cried after that one.

Hopefully your photography experience is a positive one, and you can feel those touching emotions. Each of the three types of photographers might have very different experiences, and each entrepreneur professional will have different facilities, talents, and energies that they express.

Here is our experience described for you so you can get an example of what to expect.

A high school senior is greeted at the studio door with his or her name posted outside and at the dressing room. The student is checked in and given the lay of the land. Moms and Dads are able to peak through the camera room door as we get started with a name-plate shot, and on to the first part of the session, which is usually indoors. The indoor shots are a place to get acquainted with the photographer and become more comfortable before moving to the outside with more distractions. Depending on the day, outside might also be harder to have a conversation. On a really hot day, the senior and parents will be grateful for the close proximity of the private indoor air conditioning. Photographers will vary on their ability to give you an indoor and outdoor experience, so keep in mind the conditions where you will be making changes of clothes when planning and packing. It might be in a pop-up tent provided by the photographer, a van, your car, a gas station, or even behind a tree. At our studio, ninety-percent is done within your own dressing room and at our studio, instead of on location, but sometimes a session calls for going on the farm or out to a special lake that means a lot to that senior and their story.

Once pictures are done, about a week later you have an appointment to place your order. The viewing and ordering appointment will be in our back viewing room where you relax on a couch and see the photos enlarged before you on the opposite wall. Initially we will show a slideshow of all the images, and then we will start narrowing them down to your favorites. Once favorites are determined (30–50 on average), we will begin grouping the favorites into categories that you would order from. Starting with the wall portrait, we then move onto the photos that will go into a proof set or album, next gifts for family, and finally, extras like wallets and needs for the grad party and other decoration (collages). At the end we might discuss frames, or you might have ordered everything in canvas or another type of mounting that doesn’t require a frame. All of the above items are just suggestions and everything is available a la carte.

Clients are encouraged to order as little or as much as they are able, and typically payments are divided up in parts. First, when booking your appointment, you will put down a “reservation”, and then, once ordering, a portion of that reservation will go back towards your order (for HS Seniors, we always have a special of the month, the earlier you book your session before your senior year, the higher percentage of your reservation will go back towards your order). We look at your balance due at the ordering appointment, and from there, you can pay half of your balance, and the rest at pick up, or, break the balance down into further payments as long as the order is paid in full once picked up. Flexibility is key to being able to create a plan that is pressure-free and will work for almost anyone.

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Your order is delivered in a gift box inside our Imagery Photography cloth tote bag. The finishing on the prints is always mounted (ready to frame), laminated or resin-finish, and either edged or framed. We know that things need to be fully finished for you to be able to enjoy right away. Again, remember the Christmas toy you got that didn't include the batteries? Be sure to “include the batteries” for your family members— by making sure to frame your gifts. Yes, we know that they might change out the frame later, but at least they will be able to enjoy the photo right away, and not have to worry about finding time to go shopping before they can hang up their portrait.

### **Do you feel better about you?**

And that sums up what to expect from the ‘experience’ at The Imagery. Overall, we hope that, like the white-girl dreadlocks ‘alternative’ sister, we make you feel better about YOU than when you started. That is what the ‘experience’ is really all about. This is true whether that takes place during the session, when you first see the photos on the screen, or when you picked up the final order, all retouched and enhanced to perfection, and you are ready to hang it on your wall for the world to see now and in the future. At some point, we hope it hits you. That this is a portrait that will last for generations, and one that you can be truly proud of.

It's important: senior photography is a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Plan carefully and thoughtfully. Really think about the stories of “you” that you want to leave for future generations. Have fun with it. Your photographer certainly will be planning to have fun. *This is your time.*

## Chapter 9

# The Newborn

“The absolute dependence of a newborn infant inspired many things in me, but it did not activate any magical knowledge about what to do for the next twenty years.”

– Mary Kay Blakely

Refer to Chapter 1, family, and part 1, discovering “why” you take the portrait that you do, and it all applies to the newborn as well. All the same products apply—wall portrait, albums, collages and gift sizes— with the exception of one main addition: the birth announcement.

### **Choosing a photographer**

The three types of photographers as always, play different roles and provide different experiences when it comes to newborns. You also may sometimes find a photographer that markets himself as a “Newborn Photographer,” in which case you may be getting a photographer that does nothing but newborns. All the same questions apply when interviewing photographers, and that just because they do only one type of session, the session you are looking for, does not guarantee that they are the right choice in photographer for the results that you are seeking.

### **When to do the session**

The newborn portrait is most successful when they are extremely tiny and less than 2 ½ weeks old. The newborn photos are usually done without any clothing, and just use of fabric and “swaddling” in light cloth, showing their tiny and delicate nature in their first few weeks. Baby is also typically photographed completely asleep and peacefully resting amongst soft pillows and blankets and sweet baby props.

### **What to bring**

In addition to all the things that you will need to nurse, feed and comfort baby during the course of the session, if you have any special items, such as handmade blankets, special passed-down baby shoes and silver rattles, those are especially nice to have with baby in their first portrait. We often incorporate something adult sized to put with baby as well, showing how tiny baby is at this time.

Mom and Dad’s hands are nice to use in these portraits, and wedding rings. Be sure to have hands manicured and rings polished for these special close ups, and for mom’s that bring in baby to the session without dad present, she can borrow dad’s wedding ring for the day to have at the studio for a prop as well.

If possible, Mom and/or Dad may be directed to dress all in white, all in black, or a matching color to the baby’s onesie. Even if the parents are not in this first portrait, in the event that Mom is used as a backdrop, or in the shot looking at baby, being prepared by bringing something all white and something all black will help the photographer camouflage you in

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the shot and still have the newborn be the main focus. Also prepare for possibly having your bare arms show holding baby. Think about what you want to wear in the studio that you will be comfortable in, and that will allow for a ‘bare-arms of adult’ holding-the-baby look.

For the clothed shots, vs. the naked shots of baby, our studio provides “Foto-White” brand clothing for baby, as well as options of tutus and headbands for girls and “cocoon” done in hand knits. If your photographer does not provide these items, we recommend bringing baby in a white or pastel color, simple with no patterns, to show off the delicate nature of baby. Save the bright colors and prints for sessions when they are older and showing their energetic and playful smiles.

### **What to expect during the session**

The curled-up positions seen in newborn photos are done when baby is sound asleep. Emphasis on SOUND ASLEEP. Time will be needed at the beginning of the session to make sure baby is fed and falls into a *deep* slumber so he or she can be easily and safely manipulated into different poses. We usually block a three-hour time frame, with only a ½ hour, or less, of that planned as actual camera time. Sometimes the sessions are done well within 3 hours, and sometimes they need the full 3 hours; it will depend on baby’s schedule, and at just a few weeks old, they don’t have a schedule yet! We do the best we can to accommodate the feeding and sleeping that is needed during the session. If your baby is fussy, do not worry, this is completely normal, and we have built in extra time. An experienced photographer has already dealt with anything your baby will do, including spit ups, pee and poop, red faces and drool. There will be nothing to ever be embarrassed about, even if they pee on us! Be sure to bring extra clothing in case this happens, but we also have extra clothing, and extra wipes.

Anywhere from 1 week to 3 months is a good time to have the parents in a portrait with the baby. They are completely dependent upon you, not walking or crawling around everywhere on their own yet. This one and only time that they depend on you for absolutely everything is the perfect moment in time to capture forever. For those family sessions, we like doing all black or all white clothing, with baby as the center of the story with the most exposed skin. The parents’ faces and the tiny body of baby are some of the most precious family photos you will ever take.

### **Budgeting and costs for newborn photos**

The first question we get asked for most type of sessions is cost. Refer to the chapter on family, but you also have some options to consider when looking for a newborn photographer. Consider that they may have a special “package” price for babies first 12 months. If you commit to coming back for each of baby’s milestones of 3 month, 6 month, 9 month, and 12 month, then there might be a price break or special deal. Our studio offers “Kids Club,” which gives you the option to prepay a “membership” of 1 year, 3 year, or 5 year. In baby’s first year, coming back multiple times saves you considerable money on the order.

### **Consider the grandparents—and think beyond your desktop**

We love it when grandparents call us and purchase a club membership and maybe put some money towards the first order. Grandparents want photos, and this is a good way to

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guarantee they will be offered something from the baby’s first year. Don’t rely on simply Facebook or Instagram to satisfy not only yourself for future generations, but the grandparents who might not even use social media.

Grandparents will usually want 8x10 and smaller, but for the parents, we offer options of wall prints, collages, albums, and other baby décor ideas. Our studio has a booklet created just for newborn’s room and inspiration on how to use your photos. If going with a photographer that provides nothing but a CD, finding these items and how to produce them on your own while busy raising a young family, it becomes a matter of whether or not you have the time, or whether you’d rather have someone take care of it for you. Our advice; enjoy these young baby photos while they are still babies. If you wait, they may never see the light of day, and will live in your computer forever.

### **The Experience, and special preparation you should expect from your professional**

For newborns, your photographer is going to have a nice heated indoor studio. Until they are two years old, children are easily distracted by the vast outdoors and the elements. Keeping them in a quiet, controlled space is a must. The temperature of the room should be above 80 degrees for a newborn to encourage sleep and comfort, so as a parent, expect to feel warm. Extra time should be blocked off by the photographer for Mom to break for feeding as needed, and time for the baby to fall back asleep. Cleaning supplies, wipes, towels, should be close by, so don’t worry about baby’s little leaks that will definitely occur at this age. Photographers should supply props appropriate for the age, such as posing pillows, soft blankets, heating pad, and soft, soothing music. Ask ahead of time to assure yourself that the photographer has all these needed items.

## Chapter 10

### The Stages of Childhood

“I went through various stages in my childhood, as we all do, various stages of obsessions with people and things. And I did. I wanted to be the first white Harlem Globetrotter.”

– Johnny Depp

**Newborn:** see part 2: Chapter 9

• **3 months:** They start to be able to sit up assisted by a chair back, basket or pillow, and can be propped up on their own and hold their head up a little. When they start to sit up is the next time they should be photographed. *The idea is to wait for a time when your baby is ready to do a different kind of pose for the camera.* Three months is typically when this happens, but if it happens earlier, or hasn’t happened yet, make the appointment whenever it is appropriate for your child, not a strict time-clock of “3 months.” Now we can start posing them sitting up in a posing pillow, propped up in a wagon or chair. We still do not expect to have kids smile at this age, and their attention spans are short, so we build in extra

time to get that perfect look for that split second. A nice wall portrait is not necessarily a full smile at the camera, but instead the babies eyes, the babies cute features (tiny hands, feet and toes), and the babies fun wide-eyed looks off camera at Mom or Dad or siblings.

- **6 months:** Children sit up on their own without assistance. Now baby starts to show more personality, and we can do cute over-the-shoulder looks and big smiles begin to appear. Six months is a good age for babies to appear in larger family photographs, since they are now able to sit in a lap straighter and will focus their heads forward. The baby’s individual personality and expression is beginning to emerge.

- **9 months:** Standing up holding on to something. Baby is not walking, but can crawl and hold himself next to a chair. Their personalities are really showing at this point, and they begin to play and interact with a photographer’s prompts.

- **12 months:** Walking! Now that baby can stand on her own, let’s do a shot with her arms in the air in celebration. Photographers call this the “I’m free!” pose. This is a fun time to do a “smash the cake” session in celebration of their 1<sup>st</sup> birthday. We welcome you back when they reach the next level of personality—the terrible twos!

- **18 months – 3 years:** They are on the run! Photographers that have experience with children have many tricks to hold the child’s attention. This is all about “planned play,” and my favorite phrase, “planned spontaneity.” When children come in at the age of 18 months to 2 years, they are beginning to speak, and expressing their own “will.” Their mood can be up one minute and down the next, so the professional is ready for this, knows that is normal, and puts the parents at ease so they can be patient for any situation. It is fun at this age to plan things that they can “do” within the portrait to keep their young minds busy and interacting with the photographer.

Ideas of themes: Tea party, picnic, book reading, playing with their toys, rocking in a horse, dressed up with pearls or angel wings, playing with a basket full of things like apples, rocks, flowers, etc.

Clothing and prop suggestions:

- Casual: Clothes can be brighter, but stick with simple and solid colors to make the child the star, not the clothing. Overalls and turtlenecks are easy for the child to move in and yet show off the expression.
  - Classic, whites, formal dresses and mini-suits.
  - Bring the siblings and family members. Ages 2 and up are starting to show the family resemblance, so it’s time to get some smaller group pairings with a grandparent or a sibling to share in the portrait.
  - Bring in their own toys, or bring in something that represents Mom or Dad’s day at work or a hobby.
- **Age 3-5:** Listening to Directions. Parents, you can begin to relax now, and sit back and enjoy. Let the photographer give all the directions. Now we begin to have lots of fun because the kid at age 3 is actually starting to listen, take direction—or can, if they are happy and in the right mood. This is also the age that we recommend taking children in to special portrait sessions that are limited edition and seasonal. At Imagery Studio, we have Santa, Easter,



Gon’ Fishing, Picnic Days, Fairies, and Pumpkins. Your photographer may have specials popping up regularly on “mini-sessions.” Now is when kids are developing their own special interests and hobbies, so they can bring in props and do inter-active portraits that show their passion about their “thing,” like a special toy, puzzles, baseball, karate, Tonka trucks, or dollhouses. At 4 and 5 your child is in the last stages of “Early Childhood” and will soon begin school full-time. During these precious final years they interact mainly with their parents and close friends at play dates, so we welcome shots with Mom and shots with Dad as well as with their “special things.”

• **School days, age 6–8:** The school will start to provide a “record” photograph for their yearbook and archives, and provide you with the opportunity to buy a photo package. Because a “studio” photograph is much different, here are some of the reasons why you would want to come in for professional photos instead of just relying on the yearly “record” of the school.

- Consultation and planning. You will know if advance when it’s picture day, but your child will get one opportunity to do what we refer to as “sit and spin.” You will not be present, and whatever is going on at that moment with their mood, their hair, and their smile during those quick couple shots is nothing like the 30-minute to hour-long sessions that provide for children to tell a complete story of where they are at during this particular time.
- Full retouching (most photographers will include it, some charge extra, while schools typically always charge extra.) Artistic finishing and other options for presenting your photograph are limited, if non-existent, with the school “record.”
- Options for higher-end product. Professionals can provide these option: a wall portrait, a collage, and a book option, that school “records” typically do not.
- Interactive portraits vs. “literal” portraits. The school will be focused on a smile towards the camera, which reminds you of how many teeth they had, or lack thereof, at a certain age, but a professional studio can record “interactive,” where what they capture is more about expression of personality, and often is not looking straight at the camera, but interacting off-camera.

Two things begin to be more and more possible during this time. 1) 6-8 year olds are beginning their independence, and can gain confidence by expressing what they would like to be photographed doing—including being in the camera room without a parent so they can work on “surprising Mom” with a special idea, and 2) they begin interacting with their family in portraits, and can be directed to do a variety of looks with older family members or with their siblings.

• **The start of independence, age 9-12:** The age of “independence” continues in full swing now. The photographer begins to ask you many of the same questions they would ask a high school senior, like, “If this portrait could tell a story about your child, what would you want that to be?” Think about the activities they are now involved in, which may be completely different than early childhood. Most often they are more engaged with their friends and with school activities. Children mature at various paces during this time, so the photographer should ask you to describe your child, anywhere from very shy to very out-

going. Clothing choices can, if you choose, move from being safe solid colors to expressing more of the child’s personality. If they are in a group portrait, however, keep to the rules expressed in the family portrait section. Shooting outdoors at this age is no problem because they are mature enough to hold their attention, even with distractions around them, and are less likely to want to break free and “run about.” The 9–12 year sessions are handled much the same as a high school senior, with multiple outfits, themes, and expressiveness. Kids are learning about popular music and fashion at this age, and want to feel like a star.

• **Rebellion and self-discovery, age 13–15:** Occasions: First Communion, Graduation from Middle School, and Portrait Parties. The early teens are impressionable, and some are struggling with peer pressure and self-esteem. It is a perfect time to come in for a portrait, because the young teen can be celebrated for how special and beautiful they are, no matter what stage of life they are in. A good photographer knows how to make your child feel good. Ideas for this age are much the same as with 9–12, only the teen will have more independent ideas as to what they want to wear and how they want to be. It is important to let their own creativity shine. Bring in multiple outfits, props, friends, pets, siblings, and most importantly, make it a time about “them” and how you celebrate who they are. At our Imagery Studio: Girls ages 12–15 are often our clients for “portrait parties” where entire birthday parties are invited into the studio for a good ole time, doing modeling and fun shots with friends.

• **And from 15 to Sweet 16** If a girl is interested in modeling, we usually take her out on special model sessions, and at this age they might have been asked to Prom, so you can take advantage of special portraits with the dress alone, or with her date. Otherwise, the next big time for a portrait, is their Senior Year (see Part 2: Chapter 8).

#### **A note about the Special Needs child**

**“Created with patience and love, the portraits of the special-needs child can truly touch the heart.”** –The 7 Ages of Childhood, published by PPA and Marathon Press

If your child is special needs of any kind, be sure to communicate with your photographer their strengths and limitations. As long as there is a clear understanding prior to the session, and you are working with a pro, all will be fine. The number one concern will be comfort and safety, so the photographer will cautiously choose poses that are appropriate and appreciate your guidance and input. Expressions are still the number one goal, and straight to the camera is not always the best shot. Allow extra time for the session, and the photographer will get more than enough poses to choose from. Be sure to bring items from home that your child is comfortable with, and don’t be afraid to include these items in the shot. ....

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“Prepare for Your Perfect Portrait” by Stephanie Oman, available on Amazon Books