

# Introducing Children to Photography

Photography is a great interest to share with your children. Or any children, for that matter. For parents, the joy of interesting kids in photography can either be a challenge or a delight. Often children will mimic their parents and pick up whatever hobbies their parents have. Or at least try them out. That's when it's a delight; when you spy your daughter eyeing your camera, curious how it works. On the other hand, a hobby taking over family time can often turn children off to what might have been a fun experience to share together. That's when it can become a challenge.

As a parent you have a unique opportunity to motivate your children in particular paths. Some might even call it brainwashing and to some extent it is. Kids learn primarily from their parents (in the beginning) and the examples the parents portray is often what a child sets as their own ideal. If you are a parent and wish to interest your child(ren) in photography, I have a few suggestions from my own experience.

## Make It Available

The number one way to help kids get interested in photography is to make it available to them. But you have a fancy camera, maybe, and it's hard to hand that over to a two year old who can, at times, break down and start a barrage of toys flying across the room. It's best to wait until you are sure equipment won't be smashed to smithereens before just handing over a camera. In the mean time, there are a number of age-relevant digital photo options, and teenagers (and younger) nearly all have cellphones with cameras (quite good quality now). In the past, the budget option was to use one of those 'Once-Only' 35mm film cameras but even then there was the hassle (and expense) of getting your kid's film developed when you knew that only one out of 36 shots were going to be of any use.

As your child ages and seems more responsible and coordinated, you can move into more and more useful cameras. When my daughter was seven I got her a basic Canon SureShot (I think) camera and a couple of rolls of film and let her walk around a party with it. She got very excited, walked around taking pictures from her perspective. No masterpieces but it had triggered her interest. As a parent, you will know best when your child starts to move into a more responsible age range and can handle a higher quality camera. We went through a couple more fairly cheap but capable cameras in the next half-dozen years until she was able to get something like a 3Mp digital camera and that really got her going, as she'd become quite adept on the computer by then and was able to use PS Elements (probably version 2) to tidy up the shots, re-size them, crop them etc. Just having a camera around, that is all theirs to use, will make a big difference in their adoption of the art.

Photography became of less interest when she was between 15 and 17 years old, while she was in exams etc (and at 15 to 17 the last thing they want to do is copy their parents!) but she again got interested when she saw the prints I was making, from a 'real' digital camera, when she was about 19. I followed this up with a good 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday present - an Olympus E620 - and now she's up and running, using the camera to help with her University studies, essays, dissertations etc. The trip she made from London to Beijing, via Moscow and the Trans-Siberian Express - was covered with lots of photographs (although I've yet to see them all).

Once the interest in photography begins properly, then they will start to see what can be

achieved, look at exhibitions, see what their friends are doing - and probably seeing the millions of pictures on Facebook. (I'm not really a big Facebook fan but I'm sure all those awful snaps on there inspire people to take better pictures - next thing you know, they're on courses, in camera clubs, competing.... etc).

## **Make It Easy**

Start with cameras that are easy. Point and shoot and see the image on the back. Don't worry too much about downloading to a computer (unless your child really shows interest) or printing for a while. Let them get used to the simplicity of hitting a button and freezing time on the screen of whatever might be of interest.

## **Do Cool Stuff**

When photography gets to be more commonplace with your child and they pick up the camera more often, start planning some cool outings. Think like a kid in this case. It can be something as simple as taking photos of cool stuff in the garage or a walk around the house. Or it can be as structured as a scavenger hunt with a list of objects to shoot. Make it fun and lighthearted to help that part of photography (a part many of us forget) sink in at a young age. Be spontaneous, "OK, grab your camera. We're heading to the park to see how many dog pictures we can capture!" Keep play and excitement in the frame and you are sure to help keep your child hooked on photography.

## **Ignore The Rules**

We spend our adult years learning so many rules and photography is no different. Take all those rules, some of which automatically kick in when shooting, and throw them out the window when it comes to photography with your younger child (while noting that older kids will be ready to start learning some basic photographic design tips). Their composition or lighting or angle may not be the best you've ever seen, but so what? If they take a photo and smile while showing you, you're on the right track... and when the picture is on the computer you can play with cropping until you feel you've got a more pleasant picture.

## **Show And Tell**

When my daughter was about 12 I started doing some of my first photo editing (I was using an awful Kodak Easyshare camera at the time and PhotoPlus). As my daughter's interest grew, I'd explain to her what I was doing, why I was doing it and how I was doing it, be it on the computer or behind the lens. My daughter used to sit beside me as I went through photos. I showed her some simple edits I made to photos and explained what the contrast slider did or how to use Levels. Making it fun, I would grossly exaggerate the effect, such as saturation to which she'd respond, "Whoa, that's REALLY saturated!" It was easy and fun and she learned about photography elements bit by bit.

You are a great resource to help your children get interested in photography if it is your hobby. You know how much pushing and prodding your child can take before they rebel and I'm sure you can find common ground to spark their interest without pushing them away from photography. Photography is a fun and wonderful interest to share with your child and I wish you good luck in opening their eyes to the art, craft and excitement it entails.