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2021 - 2022 Family & Portrait Session Guide





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Maternity Sessions

If you're reading this - congratulations! I know this is such a surreal time in your life (your body is literally building a human!) and it is so worth capturing this fleeting season of parenthood. Whether this is your first baby or your fifth, maternity sessions are a beautiful way to document and celebrate the upcoming addition to your family.





Tips

I generally recommend scheduling your maternity session when you're about 7 months pregnant. You're certainly showing, but (hopefully!) not quite to that often miserable time as you get closer to your due date.

Purchase or rent a dress!
For many women, pregnancy can come with mixed feelings about our bodies. You are beautiful - get yourself a dress that makes you feel that way!

Along with treating yourself to a new dress, many women opt for professional hair and makeup as well!

Not your first kiddo? I always encourage mamas to have the rest of their kids and husband participate in maternity sessions. I certainly focus on you, but it's so sweet to capture your family as they await its newest member.



"A grand adventure is about to begin."

- Winnie the Pooh

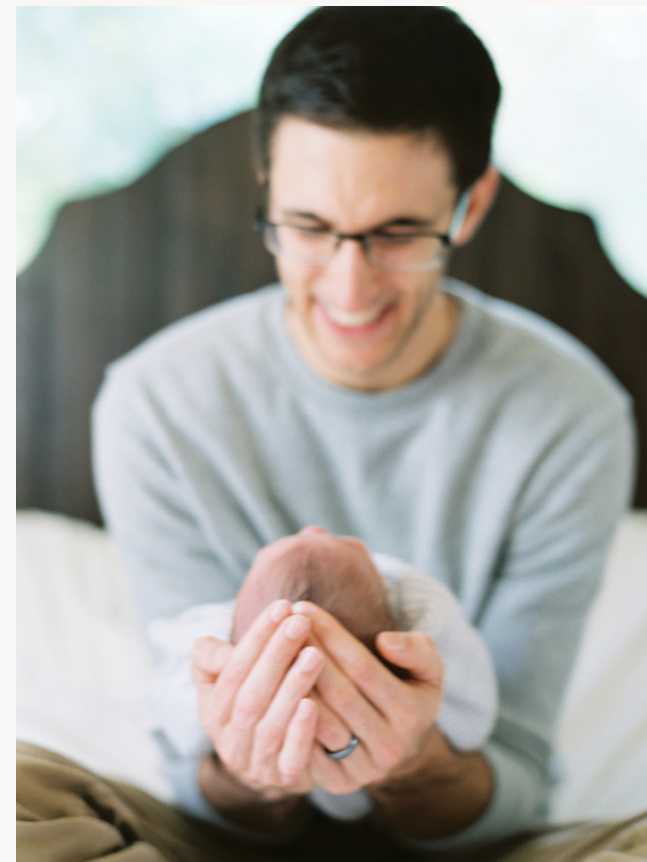
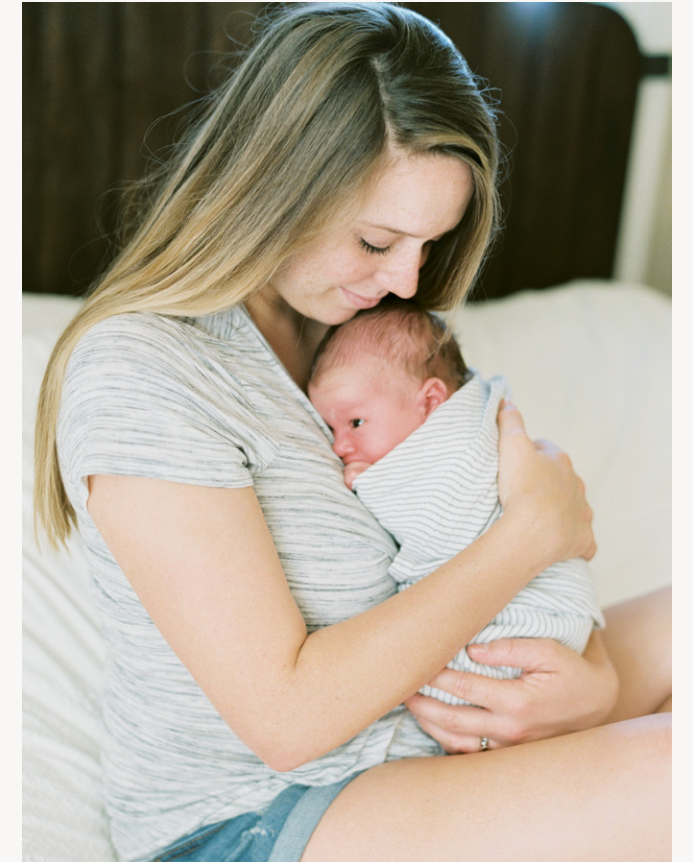
Newborn Sessions

Your little one is here! Isn't it the craziest, sleepest, most magical thing ever?? I certainly look back on those days with my sweet Adeline (seen here!) with rose-colored glasses, but it really was a beautiful time for our family.

If you're wondering if it's worthwhile to have a professional take pictures of your new baby, I can personally attest to the fact that it is! The pictures of my little fam may look sweet, but goodness. They were a LOT of work for me to take. Behind-the-scenes, there were tripods and stepstools and two grandmothers trying to figure how to use my camera and me metering and directing them and posing us and - well, you get the point! Not to mention I was physically and mentally exhausted. I really should have just had one of the many photographers I know come by and take them.

Take it from me, if you want beautiful pictures of your new baby AND a reduction in your overall stress level, get a professional to take them.

And fun fact: before I went full time with my business, I worked as a contract photographer for a company that did in-hospital newborn shoots. When I say I have photographed *hundreds* of brand new babies, I am not exaggerating!





Scheduling + Preparing

It probably comes as no surprise that newborn shoots can be among the trickier sessions to plan for. For one, we often don't know exactly when the baby will be arriving! In general, I recommend getting a date on the calendar within 2 weeks after your due date. Newborns grow quickly, and you'll want to have pictures of him/her taken before they really start to change. We can always adjust the exact date of our shoot if you deliver earlier than expected or if your little one keeps you waiting.

In most cases, newborn shoots are done in your home since it's a controlled environment. Plus, you don't have to worry about going anywhere and you'll have everything you need on-hand in case your baby gets fussy. As we approach your session date, I ask that you keep an eye on the light in your home, specifically in the spaces where you'd like to have pictures. What time of day are they brightest? That's the time of day when you want me to come over.

The next page has a few more details on how to prepare baby and your home for a newborn shoot!

Preparing Your Home

Ensure that rooms used for pictures are clean and tidy with window shades open so there's lots of light.

Shortly before I arrive, turn your thermostat up to 78-80 degrees to make sure baby is warm when when they're unswaddled

Fresh flowers are always a nice touch for in-home shoots.

Have several swaddles and outfits on hand, with at least one of each in a neutral color.

Preparing Your Baby

Make sure baby is well-fed and burped when I arrive. A hungry baby is an angry baby!

Ensure that baby's diaper is clean and dry.

Ideally, we want baby to either be happy and awake or asleep during the shoot.

We want to be shooting in a calmer environment, so if other kids are present, take note of the tips for younger children I share later in this guide,





Young Kids

If you're like me, the idea of having your toddler or young child photographed makes you feel equal parts sentimental and stressed out. Children's moods can swing like pendulums, and it can be hard to know when or if family pictures in this season are a good idea - or even do-able!

Trust me when I say that it's possible to get nice pictures of your young family. It really is! The key to getting great pictures with your little kids is to come prepared, realign your expectations with reality and simply let them have fun. I always aim to have a few smiling-at-the-camera pictures of your crew, but more often, family sessions are documented play time with "posed" pictures along the way.

I approach my engagement sessions in a similar manner - my desire is for you to have images that are authentic and meaningful. Letting your 4-year-old goof around in between posed portraits is often what's necessary in order to get the picture you want for your holiday card, but it's also what leads to genuine moments of you as a family.

Tips

Newborn prep applies to family sessions with babies! Make sure baby is well-fed, clean and well-rested (if possible!) when we have your session.

Plan on arriving early to our session location. Kids tend to slow things down, so buffer time for going potty, walking slowly, a tantrum or even an outfit swap.

Have lots of snacks on hand. A hangry kid will *never* cooperate with pictures. Sessions are often in the evening close to dinnertime since this is when the light is best, so bear in mind that kids will be getting hungry and have food on hand for them.

Have a reward or treat for your kids to look forward to. Maybe it's ice cream on the way home or a small toy - give them something to focus on during the shoot. Immediate rewards (fruit snacks work great for my 2-year-old!) given during the shoot are also helpful.





Kids Will Be Kids

I have to remind myself of this **all the time** when I take pictures of my daughter. She's a toddler, and toddlers are just not wired to sit still, smile and listen. And I know than can be so frustrating! The phrase "I just want ONE picture - is that too much to ask??" has crossed my lips more times than I can count.

When I come to a family session with young kids, I come with the expectation that 15 % will be posed Christmas card photos and the rest will likely be candid. Truthfully, I **love** this approach to family photography. It not only makes for a better experience for everyone, but also pictures that genuinely capture your family. In my experience, the pictures of my daughter being a kid (splashing in the surf at the beach or twirling in the backyard) are often my very favorite images of her.

That said, there are kids that are just downright tough at sessions. I've had kids that stared at the ground for **the entire session**. Literally. Is it frustrating? Absolutely! At a session, it's my job to direct and ensure that the images I take are high-quality and authentic. It's your role as the parent to respond to your kids' behavior appropriately.

I have a lot of tricks up my sleeve to get strong-willed kids to participate in pictures, but I can't force them to smile - or even look at me - if they refuse. It's uncommon, but an unfortunate reality that some kids will just refuse to participate. If you've never had family pictures taken with your young kids, consider how they might behave and prepare them and yourself.

Talk to them before the session about what will happen. Practice with your own camera or phone. Remember that reward I talked about on the previous page? I know you might be opposed to "bribing" your kid, but, truly, giving them something to look forward to or know they'll get if they participate has often made the difference in family sessions.



See what I mean? Kids are gonna be kids - and it will make your family's pictures all the more memorable. Letting their little personalities shine through will let them feel more comfortable and will no doubt result in some silly pictures along the way. Over the next couple pages, I share some of my favorite family pictures and what led to them.

Behind-the-Picture



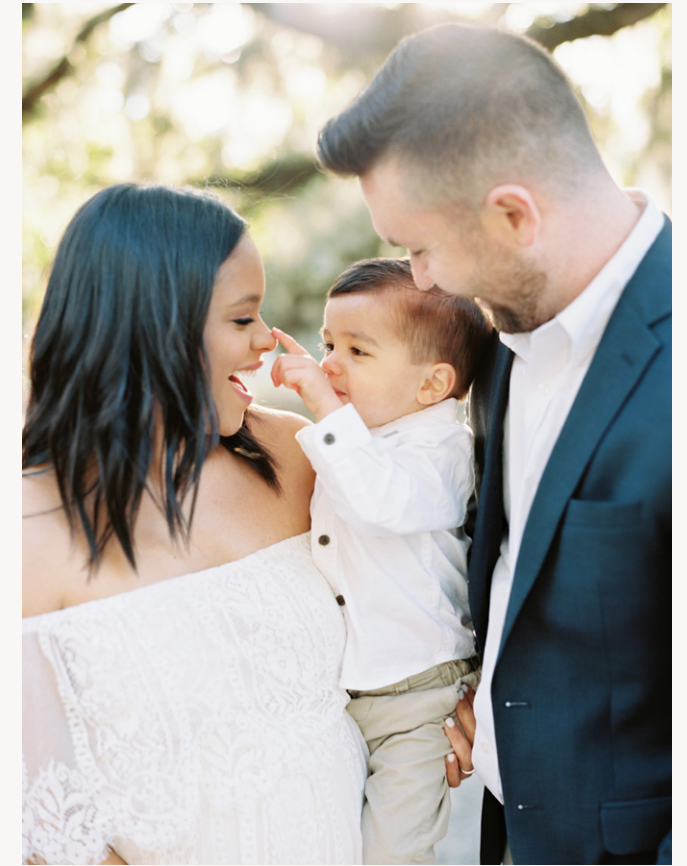
Brothers - giving each other a big hug?? Little boys can be just as affectionate as their sisters, and I love when they are. For this image, I asked them to stand next to each other and see who could give the biggest hug. Ta da!



Sometimes catching a kid by surprise is the best way to get a cute picture. Sweet Millie was being held by her mama and looking at flowers when I simply called her by name and asked her to look at me.



Is there anything sweeter than watching your baby become an older sibling? I was taking pictures of this mama with her newborn, then asked her older daughter if she wanted to climb in the chair and give her mom and baby brother a cuddle.



Boop! Kid not looking at the camera? A little boop on mama or dad's nose almost always results in some giggles and sweet candids. Sometimes smiling at each other and not at the camera makes for a better picture!



Older Kids & Teens

I'll be the first to admit that I have less experience with teens (both in front of my camera and in life), but the experience that I do have has shown me that family pictures are not reserved for young families.

I imagine that much of life gets busier the older our kids get, which is all the more reason to slow down as a family and document the fleeting season that you're in. Teens are, after all, only in your home for a few more years before they're off to college or on their own adventure.

For families with kids at an age where they can generally take direction without needing to be coaxed or rewarded (typically by age 9), family pictures have the potential to be far less hectic. I understand that teens can have their ways of being difficult, but, in general, I've found that teens (even the ones that test the limits of their parents) are often pretty reasonable with strangers (ie me!).

High School Seniors

Senior pictures are one of those portrait milestones, and I just love taking them! I've photographed hundreds of college seniors, and my approach to high schoolers is very similar - informal, candid and fun.

My biggest piece of advice for senior sessions is more for parents than the young men and women in front of the camera: be a beacon of positivity, encouragement and support. If you're unable to *not* coach how your kid smiles or looks or laughs or walks, then it's better for them and their pictures if you simply let them come to their session solo.

I know - that sounds harsh! But parents often have ideas in their head when it comes to their kids' portraits. They have smiles they like or have overheard their teen's insecure comments. In general, teens being coached by their parents will only become nervous and self-conscious in front of the camera - something that will no doubt affect how they feel about the pictures.

If you have specific concerns about how your teen will photograph or if you know of any insecurities, it is **much** better for you to email me *before* his/her session and let me know. They are far more likely to respond positively to my directions. Your role at their session is to say "you look so beautiful/handsome/pretty/confident/amazing!!" more times than you can count.

The picture to the right is a clear example of an image that happens when a young woman feels confident. For the first part of this session, her mom consistently tried to "correct" her smile, telling her she was showing too many teeth. It was clear how deflated she felt each time her mom said something. Eventually, I asked her mom to wait at the bottom of this hill (out of earshot and sight) since we'd need some space to walk around. Simply having space from her mom's coaching made this teen feel so much more confident and resulted in her favorite pictures from our time together.



A pregnant woman is shown from the waist up, wearing a white, short-sleeved, button-down dress. She is holding a small red flower in her right hand, which is resting on her belly. Her left hand is also resting on her belly. The background is a blurred garden with green foliage and various flowers, including orange and pink ones. The word "Details" is written in a white, cursive font across the center of the image, overlapping the woman's belly and hands.

Details



Session Locations

Not sure where you want your pictures taken? I love to be hands-on in this decision since it has a big influence on your pictures and the conditions we'll be shooting in.

If you have a meaningful location where you'd like your session to take place, awesome! Just be sure that it's a location that:

- a) is age-appropriate for kids
- b) has good space and light
- c) ideally, doesn't have large crowds we'll have to work around or have as an audience



What to Wear

The most common concern for families leading up to their session is what in the world to wear! I'm no different when I find myself on the other side of the lens and am truly one of the most indecisive people when it comes to picking out clothes!

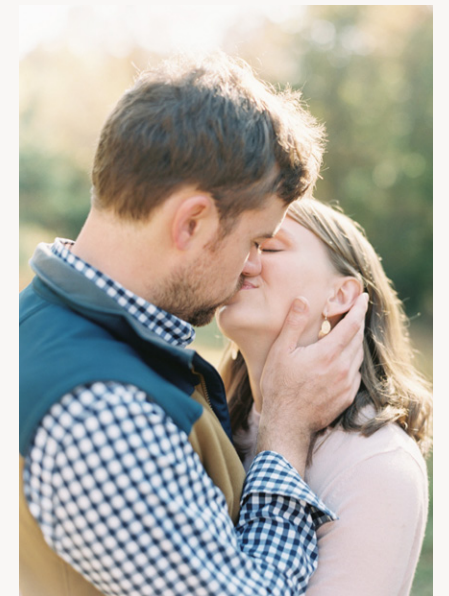
My biggest piece of advice is this: wear outfits you love and feel absolutely beautiful in.

Confidence is probably the most important thing to bring with you to your session - and yes, even the most camera shy individual can feel great being photographed if they feel awesome in what they're wearing. If you feel insecure during our session, you're likely to feel insecure when you see your pictures. This has nothing to do with clothing size or weight (something I obviously can't change as a photographer), but far more to do with feeling really great about yourself.

Be sure to pick pieces that make you feel great about your body - not just pieces that look nice on a model. It can be tempting to get a dress that is amazing, but that you also know is in a cut that you know won't be flattering. For example, after years and years of trying, I finally just had to accept that cinched-waist dresses are a no-go for me! No matter how much I loved a cinched-waist dress on the hanger, I almost never liked it when I put it on.

Choose outfits that complement each other. While it's important to coordinate your colors, try to avoid being super matchy-matchy (like the dreaded jeans and white shirts on a beach days!). Don't be afraid to mix patterns or textures either. If you're feeling really stuck, you can't go wrong with a neutral or pastel color palate. Generally, I recommend women pick their outfits first, then move on to what the kids will wear and finally to the men, who usually have a good neutral outfit that will go with what the rest of the family is wearing.

I've also created a Pinterest board of outfit ideas to help provide some inspiration, which can be ***viewed here***.



Where to Shop

There are so many places to look when it comes to finding the perfect outfits for your session - sometimes it can be daunting! Often we come into sessions with a specific vision for what we want our pictures to look like, and it can feel impossible to get all the right pieces to make that vision a reality.

To the right I've compiled some of my favorite brands to help you get your search started! Several of these stores offer free shipping (and free returns!) so you can purchase several options, see what fits best and return the unused items. In any case, be sure to allow as much time as possible to decide on outfits! You don't want to order the perfect dress less than a week before you session only for it to arrive late or not fit as expected. Give yourself time to weigh different options and be indecisive so that come session day, you know what everyone will be wearing. Feel free to pass along your outfit ideas to me if you need a second opinion!



WOMEN

Anthropologie
ASOS
H&M
Zara
Madewell
Modcloth

MEN

H&M
J. Crew
Gap
Goodwell & Co. at Target
Eddie Bauer

KIDS

ASOS
H&M
Carters
Gap
Zara

MATERNITY

ASOS
H&M
Seraphine
Pink Blush
Hatch

You can also shop from **Amazon storefront** where I've saved some outfit ideas.

A Few More Things to Consider

I know, I could go on for a while about what to wear, but I tend to err on the side of too much information on this topic because it is the topic I'm asked about most often by families! So, here's a list of other details to consider when choosing outfits:

- What is the color of the session location? If we're shooting in a lush tree or garden setting, then it's not going to be a good idea to wear green because you'll likely blend right in or clash! My only exception to this rule is with neutral tones (creams, whites, tans, etc) at a beach or pasture setting since neutrals are more likely to complement each other.
- Personally, I tend to lean towards more muted or pastel colors for sessions since they're often a timeless choice. However, I'm not immune to the red dress or wonderfully patterned outfit! Again, just be sure to consider our location and what your partner/family will be wearing. Mixing patterns (like the ones to the right) can be really well-done, but they can also look busy or confusing.
- It's also important to think about your home's aesthetic when it comes to family pictures! Since images often end up in frames, you don't want your pictures to clash with their surroundings. My home has a soft blue/green/neutral color scheme, so, you guessed it - that's what my family is most often wearing in our pictures!
- Don't be afraid to have your kids pick their outfits! Obviously, this comes with some age/maturity requirements, but it's just as important that your kids feel great in what they wear.
- If you have young children who refuse to wear what you've picked for them don't be afraid to compromise. Allowing your 4-year-old daughter to bring her Elsa costume with her for a few pictures at the end of our session might be all you need for her to happily participate. You'll likely get the pictures you want, along with some fun ones that she'll love and that you, in time, will no doubt come to appreciate.



Final Tips



Rent, don't buy! If you're looking for a killer dress, but don't want to break the bank, Rent the Runway is a great option.

Always have a backup outfit for young kids! Kids can be messy, so have a spare outfit for kids under 5 in case of accidents. I also recommend arriving early and getting young children dressed at the session location whenever possible to avoid potential accidents in the car.

Layer up. It's not only helpful if the weather is a little cooler than expected, but a nice jacket or cardigan can provide an easy "second" outfit to add a little diversity to your pictures.

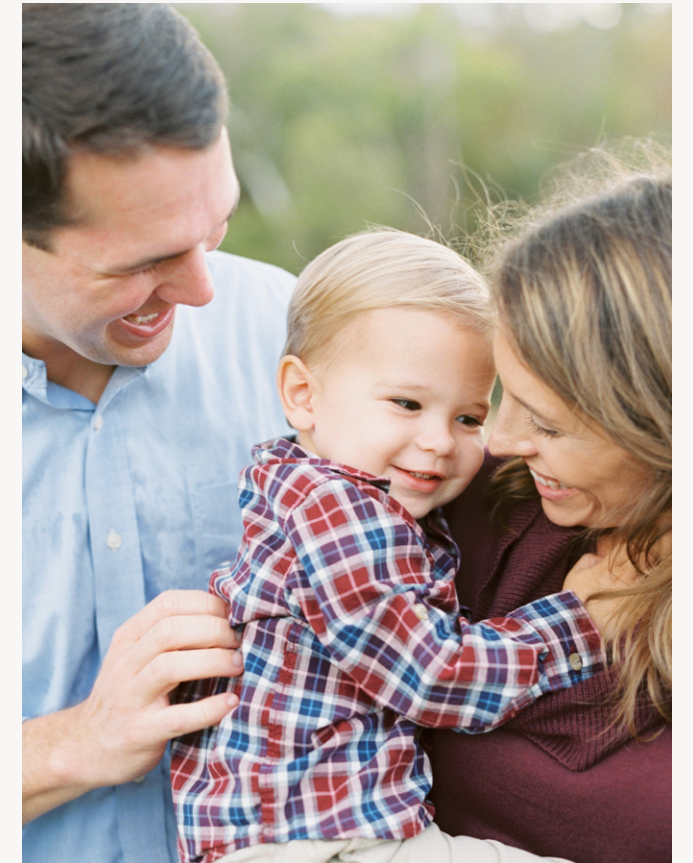
It's up to you if you want your images to feel more formal (maxi dresses and sports jackets) or relaxed (sundresses and jeans). Both routes are good ones and can often be tailored to fit our session location well.

A family of four is sitting on a white patterned blanket on a sandy beach. From left to right: a young man with curly brown hair wearing a light blue button-down shirt and tan pants; a woman with curly brown hair wearing a dark blue patterned cardigan over a black top and blue jeans; a man with short grey hair wearing a blue and white checkered button-down shirt and blue jeans; and a young woman with dark hair wearing a pink lace top and blue jeans. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera. The background consists of tall, thin beach grasses and a clear sky.

Mini Sessions

The Beauty of Minis

There are probably a hundred reasons why mini sessions are great for families - particularly families with young kids! They capitalize on kids' shorter attention span, require less from parents and are typically easier on the budget. Full sessions are perfect for getting a thorough collection of images from this season, but mini sessions are great for families who just need a snapshot - or a picture for their holiday card!



Tips

Arrive early.

Don't be late.

Don't be late!

Arrive early!





Don't Be Late!

Did you catch my repeated tips on the last page? It's for good reason! Arriving early is the single biggest piece of advice I can give mini session families. With full sessions (which are typically 60-90 minutes) we can ride out a toddler's tantrum, pause to let a mama nurse her baby or give all the kiddos a break for a snack. That is not the case for a 25-minute mini session! Mini sessions are scheduled back-to-back, so there's no wiggle room to go over a few minutes because it potentially cuts into another family's time.

All the outfit and preparation guidance I've given in these pages won't amount to anything if you arrive late, flustered and unable to utilize the entirety of your session - or get as many images as you were hoping to receive.

My advice? Plan to arrive *at least* 10 minutes early to your session. Just like in a full session, you want to give yourself time to feel gathered and ready. If you have a toddler that can cause delays (hint: all toddlers cause delays!), then give yourself extra time. Will you be driving during rush hour? Give yourself extra time. Could parking be tricky? Give yourself extra time.

The worst thing that can happen by arriving early is that you have to wait a little bit for the family before you to finish. The worst that can happen if you're late for your own mini session is that you miss it altogether - and there's no refund for that!

Final Thoughts



Final Tips

Enjoy yourself! Don't allow something that should be a fun experience for your family become a major stressor.

Examine your expectations. Whether you've booked a mini or a full session, take note of your expectations and share any specific or important ones with me. Either I'll reign you in or I'll do my very best to meet it.

Communicate. Involve your spouse and kids in the process. Talk about colors schemes and poses.

Let your kids have fun with some ideas and we can set aside a little time for them to be creative. They'll enjoy themselves so much more if they feel equally invested.

Have fun! Yep, I pretty much already said that, but it's worth repeating! Your family will only look the way it does right now for a short period of time - soak up every bit of that!





In Closing

If you're reading this it's because you've already entrusted me to take pictures of the people you love most, and I consider that such a privilege! My goal with this guide was to provide answers to common questions, but also to equip you to make the most of your time in front of my camera.

I've been a mom for about 2.5 years now, and while I'm still in the early years of parenting, there is one thing I know for sure: time is a thief. Pictured here is my sweet Adeline. Those newborn pictures of her I shared earlier feel like they happened yesterday. The pictures I've taken of her have become some of my most treasured possessions. My hope is that I can give you the same sense of joy and awe with pictures of your family, as I get when I look at a picture of my little girl.

Thank you for trusting me with capturing this season. Your session is going to be *amazing* and I am so looking forward to documenting your family in this season!

