

Photographers Tips and Tricks

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Wow. When I first heard about the NILMDTS mission I said to myself there's no way I could ever do this. I was wrong. And, thankfully so. The gift I am able to give through photographing these sessions for families in their time of need is priceless.

Just as the Hippocratic oath says, "I will prescribe regimens for the good of my patients according to my ability and my judgment and never do harm to anyone." We as photographers want to be especially careful in our approach as different people are going to react to the stress of the situation in different ways. This will have an impact on the images you are able to create. Some family members may wish to be close and hold the baby, others may not. Being sensitive to the individual reactions as you ask and gently direct the time with your subjects is extremely important. Never try to force a pose or situation upon your subjects. Let gentleness be your guide as you gauge reactions to your suggestions and requests.

Let's talk about how various sessions may go and the posing of the child and the families to get the best out of any situation you might encounter.

Before your session starts you can get a good feel from the nurses on how things are going with the parents, how they are holding up and information they may have already shared about how they would like the session to go.

Mother and Child

I usually start with mother and child together. Mom cradles the baby in what I call the 'Madonna' pose. I ask if mom wants to give the baby a gentle kiss. Usually I crop close in my compositions to remove as much of the hospital equipment and environment as possible, filling the frame with just mom and baby. I suggest an image of mom's hand with the child's hand.

Add Dad and the Family

If dad is there, I ask him to add his hand to capture all three hands together. Then mom removes her hand then dad's hand is alone with the child's. Photograph mom, dad and baby together. If there are other children to be part of a complete family portrait, I will arrange them on or around the bed to capture one of everyone together. Then ask dad to hold the child and ask for a gentle kiss.

Other relatives may be there like parents and in-laws. I usually have checked with mom first to know if they wish for images to be made with other family members. Be careful, there's a potential minefield of emotions to watch out for.

Child Alone

This part of the session is usually done after posing with the family, but may occur before as well. Either way, depending upon the condition of the child, you'll definitely want to get a full body image, followed by a head and shoulders. If there are serious deformities visible it's possible to become creative with the judicious use and placement of the blanket or clothing.

This is the time I use to capture all the tiny parts. It's helpful to have a macro or close-focusing lens for these images so you can fill the frame with these delicate appendages. Don't forget the ears, fingers, toes and both feet. Ask if the family has brought toys, religious items or a bracelet with the child's name to the hospital as they become elements to add to these captures. During some sessions, I have been asked to photograph the parent's wedding rings intertwined with the child's fingers as that is an image seen in the NILMDTS literature.

Remember as you do your session to be as creative as possible while being sensitive to the feelings of your subjects. The images created during these sessions are treasures to these families, and what you capture will help in their healing process.