

WELCOME GUIDE

STYLE ADVICE, TIPS & TRICKS TO
BETTER PLAN FOR YOUR SESSION



I KNOW HOW
MUCH THIS
MATTERS

I am so excited for your session! I feel so honored to capture these special moments in your life together. I've created this guide to help you get the most out of your photos, and by the time you've read through it, I hope you'll have all your questions answered and feel excited and prepared for your session. I'll take care of the rest! Your only job is to be yourself, laugh a lot and let me create beautiful photos you'll cherish forever.

If you have more questions when you're done reading through this guide, please don't hesitate to ask!



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CHOOSING THE RIGHT DATE, TIME, AND LOCATION

DATE

Most clients schedule their sessions on weekends so my weekends sometimes book out several weeks in advance, but I do have weekday availability as well. If you cannot find a date/time that works for you, please reach out and I'll see if I have any flexibility in my schedule.

If your shoot is outdoors, please take weather into consideration, I understand we cannot predict the weather, but I always want to be mindful with little ones in extreme heat or cold.

TIME

Early mornings and late afternoons work best for outdoor shoots. When the sun is directly overhead (midday), it casts harsh shadows and can be unflattering. Because of this, I only book earlier in the morning or later in the afternoon/evening for outdoor shoots.

The best light for your photos will occur during "golden hour," which is the hour immediately before sunset or right after sunrise, when the sun is close to the horizon and casts soft, rich light. To establish a start time for your photo "golden hour" shoot, look up the sunset time for our shoot date (and location) and subtract an hour. That's the ideal time for us to start!

Remember, the sun sets much earlier during winter and much later during summer, so make sure to factor that in when choosing your portrait session date, especially if you're taking off work or have small children with an early bedtime.

If evenings are difficult for your family to accommodate, a golden hour morning session might work best. The benefits of an early morning shoot are usually fairly empty locations and I have less bookings, so you can book on shorter notice.

LOCATION

There are several outdoor locations that produce beautiful nature scenery and light that I like to use. While these locations are where I typically photograph, I am open to new locations, so if you have a specific location in mind, please feel free to reach out and we can discuss it and see if that would work for your shoot!

- Exner March, Lake In The Hills
- Lordes Park, Elgin
- Willows Edge Park, Crystal Lake
- Fetzner Park, Crystal Lake
- Barbara Kay Park, Lake In The Hills
- Ted Spella Communtiy Park, Algonquin
- Butternut Preserve, Crystal Lake
- Hoffman Park, Cary
- Moraine Hills State Park, McHenry

STYLE TIPS

FOR HER

DON'T BE AFRAID TO DRESS IT UP

Have you ever dreamed about rocking a romantic gown, tulle skirt, or flower crown, but just never had an occasion for it? This is your chance to do it up! Remember: there is no such thing as “too dressed up” when it comes to your session, so don't be afraid to have some fun!

Dresses and skirts look stunning because they really flatter every female body, especially on camera. What's more, a full and flowy skirt is like a built-in "prop," giving you something to twirl and swirl, and adding effortless movement and interest to your photos.

TIPS FOR CONSIDERING YOUR OUTFITS COLOR, FABRIC & CUT

When choosing color(s) for your outfits, I recommend selecting soft, light tones and muted shades. By avoiding ultra-bright, bold colors, it will help bring all the attention to your faces.

Black, though slimming, can become very shapeless in photos.

A solid-colored fabric with texture is always a winner, but if you don't want to wear (or don't have) a solid-colored article, select a print that is minimalist and understated, rather than bold and design-forward. Think dainty florals, repetitive geometric motifs, or small stripes. Another way to add visual interest is to opt for texture like lace, linen, denim, chiffon, or tulle.

Flowy tops, dresses, and skirts look amazing on camera because they bring extra movement to the photos, especially when paired with nature. Consider a cut that allows for beautiful movement in the images.

If you're an expecting mother, I always recommend floor-length gowns or maxi dresses. Whether form-fitting or loose and flowy, these dresses create the best silhouettes to flatter your figure and really highlight your bump.

STYLE TIPS FOR HIM

THE BEST FIT

Long, fitted pants and closed-toed shoes are a very sophisticated look for men. They draw attention away from his legs and feet and place it where you want it: on his handsome face. Fitted dress pants or fitted solid-colored pants work best on camera. Denim looks great if it's a clean structured denim. Pinstripes and plaid patterns tend to distract the eye. I also recommend staying away from graphics, logos, and anything with words.

MIX IT UP

Feel free to mix a suit coat, blazer or sport coat with a different pant color. It adds some extra visual interest, and breaks up the color tones. This is a fresh take on a timeless classic!

LAYERED LOOKS

Layers on men look great on camera. Even if it feels overdressed, adding another layer will bring extra dimension and visual interest to your photos. Blazers, vests and sweaters up the level of any look. Don't be afraid to get a little creative with layers!

ITS ALL IN THE DETAILS

Brown leather dress shoes complement almost every look, whether he's wearing a full suit or tailored jeans. Ties, pocket squares, colored socks, belts, tie clips, suspenders, vests, and watches are sharp complements to any outfit for men and boys alike.

MY NUMBER ONE PRINCIPLE FOR DRESSING A FAMILY FOR THEIR PHOTO SESSION IS "COORDINATING, NOT MATCHING." USE THE TIPS BELOW TO MAKE SURE EVERYONE'S OUTFIT LOOKS AMAZING INDIVIDUALLY AND AS A GROUP.

1) START WITH A "THREE CORE COLOR" PALETTE OF NEUTRALS & NEARLY-NEUTRALS

Before you go unloading your whole family's dressers and drawers, you can simplify this process with a plan. And the plan is to pick a palette. Start by selecting a base plus 2-3 colors from the neutral and nearly-neutral swatches below and build most of the outfits using those 2 to 3 colors.

Note: black can become very two-dimensional and shapeless in photos, so if you want to incorporate black, keep it to a minimum and keep it on the bottom half of the outfit if you can.

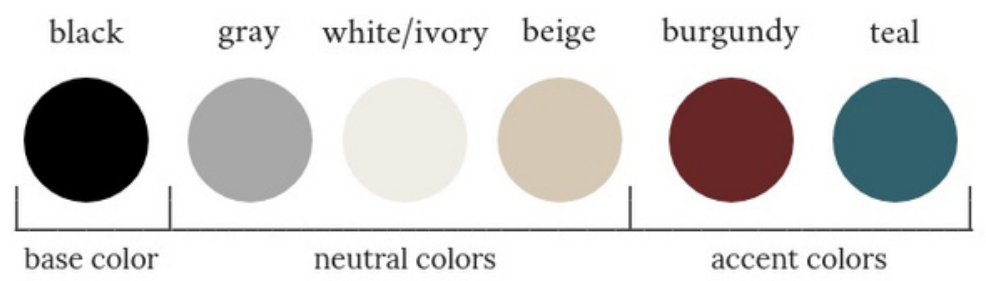
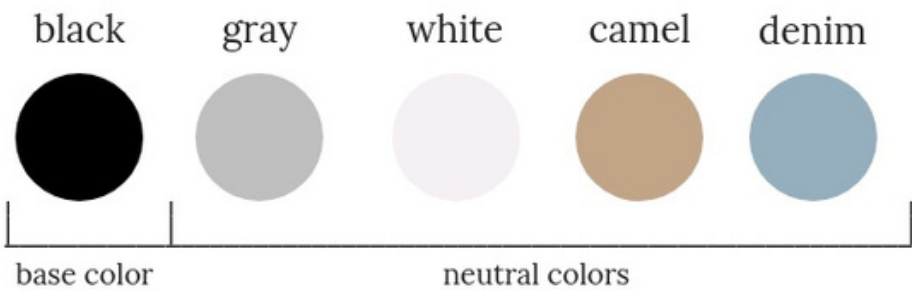


2) ADD ONE OR TWO ACCENT COLORS

If you want to add a bit of variety, or if you can't find a complete outfit from your 3 core colors, add in one or two accent colors, to be used less frequently than the core colors. These colors should complement the neutrals and nearly-neutrals that you're already using.

Finish off by adding nonessential clothing items such as wraps, sweaters, hats or statement accessories such as watches, ties, bracelets, hair bows, and jewelry that fits the core and accent colors.

Use these sample palettes to visualize wardrobe options for your family.



Want to simplify your family outfit even more?
Go all neutral.

Does picking a palette sound like too much? You can hit the easy button and still let everyone shine by going all-neutral all the way. Start with cream, tan, beige or grey for most of the pieces, then mix in a couple nice colors like olive green or khaki pants and finish it off with a couple hits of visual interest with texture or a pattern like satin, polka dots or a wool hat. Add some accessories like a bow or a throw over jacket for Dad.



Want more guidance? Going for a certain look? Don't be afraid to ask! I can put together a full custom wardrobe board with all the links.



HOW TO PREP YOUR LITTLE ONES

TIP #1: Practice smiling. I know this sounds silly, but try practicing with cues like, "Show me your teeth!" or "Say ice creeeeam!"

TIP #2: Find a song, dance, or video that captures their attention and brings out joy. I've learned that small kids can't fake it. They feel what they feel. And you can hack that! Prior to your photo session, practice singing some songs or learn some silly dances that make your child(ren) genuinely happy. Another genius method of doing this is to load up a YouTube video that your kids like watching or listening to. If I hold it next to my camera, they'll look my way!

TIP #3: Pack a toys and snacks bag. Before your session, pack a bag with snacks, water, and any small objects (like toys or treats) that might help us get their attention when it's time for them to look at the camera.

TIP #4: Give a pep talk. If they are old enough to understand you, it's a good idea to prepare them for what's to come before the session starts. Explain how much the photos mean to you so they know to be on their best behavior.

TIP #5: Good old fashioned bribery. A lot of families discuss and pick a treat that the kids will receive after the session if they're good listeners and smilers, like an ice cream cone, for example. I also typically bring small treats for kids if parents allow.

HOW TO PREP YOUR LITTLE ONES

That being said, don't be worried about how your kids will behave or embarrassed if things don't go as planned. They're little, and their unfiltered, unpredictable emotions and outbursts are part of the reason you want to remember this season in life. It's my aim to help you embrace these moments with them instead of trying to make them act a certain way for an hour or more. We will make sure to get some shots of everyone smiling and looking at the camera, but for the most part I want you to just have a great time and be yourselves.

My favorite thing to capture is all of those in-between moments that can't be perfectly posed anyway. If one of your children starts running away from the group giggling, scoop them up and smother them in tickles and kisses. If they are shy or upset, hold them close and tell them how wonderful you think they are while tucking their hair behind their ear. If you as a parent keep smiling and having a good time, I will be able to capture sweet moments the whole way through.

Sometimes
“imperfect”
situations can
lead to the
perfect photo.
And trust me, I
know that some
of your favorite
photos will be
of the intimate
or silly
moments that
nobody planned
on!

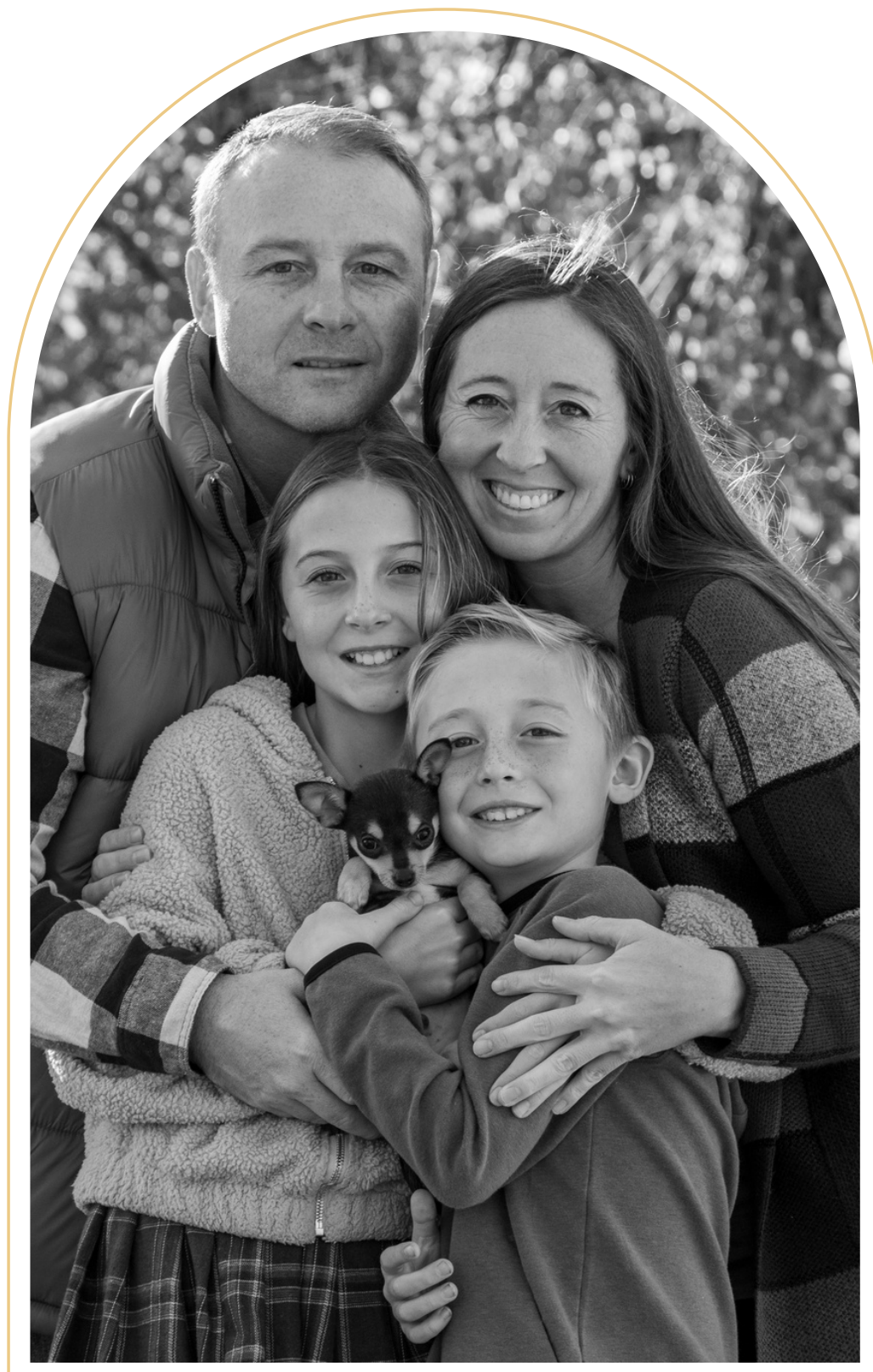


PHOTO SESSION CHECKLIST

- Set date, time and location with Sara
- Review guide for style tips
- Select everyone's outfit
- Schedule hair and makeup appointments (if desired)
- Pack a bag with:
 - Flats or flip-flops for walking between photo spots (if you choose to wear heels)
 - Touch-up makeup and towels to dab sweat
 - Snacks, treats and water for the little ones
 - If you have a toddler or younger, small eye catching toys (or lollipops) to hold their attention

PHOTO EDITING AND DELIVERY TIMELINE

I will email you an invitation and directions to view your photo gallery 2-3 calendar weeks after your session. After choosing your allotted amount of photos, you will be able to download your images. Any physical deliverables (such as prints or canvas) can be ordered directly through me.

ONE FINAL NOTE

I know that all of this is a lot to think about. I created this guide to help make your family session experience something you look back fondly on for years to come. At the end of the day, though, the location you choose and the outfits you select won't matter nearly as much as the memories you make together. Your future memories are the most important thing to me, and I want your session to be a time for you to just be yourselves and enjoy. Have fun together. Laugh a lot. And I'll take care of the rest!