
Tips for Photographers

- Learn about the person's personality, physical challenges, behavioral triggers, motivators, and comforts. Interview family members and/or caretakers, as well as the person being photographed, to help build familiarity. You may have to meet the person several times to establish some comfort level so the time needed may be significantly more than a typical photo session.
- Learn about the general characteristics of autism. Be understanding, flexible and patient.
- Talk directly to the person, not the caretaker. Provide clear descriptions of what will happen, and the order activities will occur. A picture story of the photo session may be helpful. If something goes wrong or if there is a change in the order of activities, explain it clearly before the transition.
- A person with autism often has difficulty with eye contact. It may be difficult to photograph the person looking directly at the camera. It may be better to photograph the person gazing at a preferred object rather than forcing a direct stare into the camera.
- Let the person guide the photo session. Use the information you gathered in previous interviews to lead the person in a positive way.
- Catchy expressions (e.g. "say cheese," "show me those pearly whites," etc.) may be confusing to a person with autism.
- Refrain from physical contact as much as possible.
- Bright lighting and flashes may be challenging for a person with autism. Studio lights and flashes may result in increased anxiety. Try to use natural or soft lighting.
- Move cables or other objects that could be dangerous or distracting.
- Avoid having other people behind the camera. The subject may not be able to know where to focus or may be challenged by the distractions.
- Try to photograph the person in a place that is familiar and comfortable to him or her.
- Don't try to force a posed photograph. Don't worry about taking the "perfect" picture. Take pictures when the person is engaged in something personally intriguing. Capture the person's natural mannerisms in everyday situations when the person is least aware of the photographic activities.

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For more information about this program contact: KohlsAutismAwareness@childrens-specialized.org