

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

Technology that Brings Families Together

SMALL CHILDREN TODAY can scroll through photos on mobile phones faster than a baker pours fine flour through a sieve. Once, getting your picture taken was a special looking-your-best occasion. We've long passed from the era of stiff portraiture into technology that produces instantaneous results. However, the overload of digital images in our busy lives can cut down on the tradition of looking carefully at photos and reminiscing about their meaning.

Discussing photographs with children is a great way to encourage conversation and develop common memories. Scientists now know that the brain doesn't record our history in a running video of what actually happened. Our memories are based on subjective images. Talking about photos reveals that each person in a family or a classroom has her own perspective.

Teachers often take photos of children that will communicate special meaning to parents or to the children themselves. Painting a picture. Cutting on a line. Writing a story. Creating a hideout with a friend. These images convey a developmental portrait of a child's learning—emotionally, socially, and physically.

Photos taken at school can spark a far richer discussion between parent and child than the traditional question "What did you do at school today?" At the start of the school year, photos offer a sneak preview of skills that will be mastered and activities expanded in the future. Reflecting on these photos helps us to be aware of what's happening with a child right now, rather than worrying about the future.

Modern technology—computers, videogames, e-mail—often separates family members. Photography has the power to bring people together. Choose a "photo of the week" and post it on the refrigerator. Extend the fun of a family outing by letting everyone take pictures. Create photo books of vacations and special events to muse over and solidify your memories.

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