

# How to take Candid Christmas photos

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For the best photographs of your family and friends this Christmas, the key to success is simply to relax and let it happen. Posed pictures can't quite capture the sense of fun and laughter that we very much hope Christmas brings, which is where candid photos really have the edge. And, of course, you have huge advantages with family and friends as your subjects: you've got access and familiarity. If they're used to seeing you prowling around with your camera, you're way ahead of the game. Best of all, they're likely to ignore you – and that's exactly what you want in order to capture candid photos of them just being themselves.

You'll get the most natural results when you capture people simply doing what they're into doing: dinner preparations, gift wrapping, chatting, table setting, eating, drinking, playing. It's not just Christmas dinner that's photogenic, it's also the work that went into its preparation, along with wrapping and giving gifts, and of course the Christmas board games and charades.

Two classic moments are the kids (OK, and the grown-ups!) rushing from their rooms on Christmas morning to see what 'Santa' has left under the tree, and then eagerly opening their presents. To ensure you don't miss any magic moments, shoot in burst mode – particularly with children, who don't tend to slouch when it comes to ripping off the wrapping paper! As with any portraiture, aim to keep sharp focus on the eyes for the best results. Also, when you're photographing kids, don't just stand there towering over them – get down to their level so you capture what they see.

If you're using a COOLPIX compact, use its many features and modes to make your picture-taking a whole lot easier. Scene modes make it a synch to get well-lit, sharp images in a variety of situations, including Party/Indoor, Beach/Snow, Night Portrait, Food and Night Landscape – all perfect for Christmas photos. With a Nikon 1, make the most of features such as Motion Snapshot to capture video and images all in one, while full-HD video capture lets you tell the complete story of your celebration.

With a DSLR you'll really benefit from its ability to deal with low-light conditions, both via its high ISO sensitivity and its flash capabilities, either from the powerful built-in flash or from an accessory Speedlight. You'll generally get better results indoors from a Speedlight bounced off a wall or the ceiling to soften its light. Keep an eye on your [white balance](#) too, as you may need to switch it over to incandescent when shooting indoors. To give you more scope for colour correcting after the event, shoot in RAW (NEF) if you have the option.

A lens with Vibration Reduction (VR) means you'll be able to handhold for increased flexibility and blur-free results in conditions normally too dark to allow this. A fast lens is also very handy for dispensing with flash in low light, while a longer lens – at least 80mm – enables you to zoom in on natural facial expressions without having to get so close that you disturb your subjects and then run the risk of them hamming it up for the camera. Cropping in close on little details with a zoom can really help capture the Christmas story: little feet coming down the stairs, wide excited smiles, small hands opening their gifts.

And even if you're not planning on taking a picture, keep your camera at hand; you never know when a great moment is going to happen. 'Hang on a sec while I get the camera' is a sure sign you missed the shot...

### **Five fast festive tips:**

1. Make sure your camera gear is ready to use before Christmas morning – charge up the battery, make sure the lenses are clean and that there is plenty of space on your memory card.
2. Try including fairy lights and decorations as a defocused background for portraits by selecting a large aperture; this can result in some beautiful bokeh.
3. Pets love to get in on the act, too – cats in particular are obsessed with Christmas trees, and a close-up of a feline face eyeing up a shiny bauble can work beautifully.
4. Do include some Christmassy scene-setting still lives – table/tree decorations, crackers, wine glasses, the turkey ready to be carved, the flaming pudding.
5. Black and white can look very atmospheric for festive candids, and it also removes distractions from too many competing colours to create a calmer image that's easier to 'read'.