We all have school photos we'd rather not dwell on, complete with cheesy backdrops, odd expressions and that weird, unnaturally occurring head-tilt. Some are adorable in spite of their oddness--or *because of* it, really--but if you want to ensure those pics really capture your kiddo, try these tips, courtesy of Linda Russell, professional photographer and mom:

1. Avoid hats. "Photographers will often remove them for the shoot," explains Russell, "then the child is left with 'hat head.'"

2. Stay away. "Children are more natural when no one is watching--that means you, mom peeking around the corner."

3. Practice doesn't always make perfect. "Don't practice poses with your child," advises Russell. (People do that?) "Let the photographer unlock kids' natural expressions, not cheesy grins they've rehearsed for hours."

4. What not to wear. "For boys, avoid words, superheroes and pop culture images on t-shirts. The best bet is a collared shirt that compliments their eyes and hair. Small patterns or solids are best." And for girls? "Avoid spaghetti straps," says Russell. "They tend to hang low and if it is chilly, the goose bumps on their arms show."

5. Strike while it's hot. "Ironing your child's collar in the a.m. will make a big difference in those head shots."

6. Show off that smile! "A gap tooth or braces are beautiful," says Russell. "Let them shine!

Don't have kids keep their mouths closed."

7. Glasses on? Glasses off? "For eyeglasses, non-reflective lenses are best. Feel free to ask the photographer to shoot a photo with and without the glasses to see what you prefer."

8. Good hair days. "Schedule the hair cut at least 10 days ahead of photo day." She adds, "Ponytails are great with barrettes or hairpins to manage the flyaways."

Linda Russell is CEO of Mugshots School Photography (MugsyClicks.com). She believes in bringing local professional photographers back in schools, and getting kids outside and as far away from cheesy backdrops as possible.