5 Life Lessons We Can Learn From Little Ones
By Claudia Kapusinski

“The soul is healed by being with children.” When I first heard this quote by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, I thought it rather fanciful. Now, several months into my part-time job at my university’s Child Development Center, I realize just how perceptive the Russian novelist was. And though I’m only with the children (ages 8 weeks to 5 years) a few days each week, being a teacher’s aid has shown me that little ones have much to teach us about life.

1. Slow Down

We live in a fast paced society where, unlike in The Tortoise and the Hare, our outlook is not “slow and steady wins the race” but that the swift are the most successful. “This is progress in America. You always move forward and there are no limits to how far you can go or how fast you can get there. Don’t pause, don’t reflect. You win or lose. You’ll fall behind and fail if you stop moving,” writes Dr. Stephanie Brown, a Silicon Valley psychologist, when describing the typical American’s attitude in an article for the New York Post. But this mentality is unhealthy because “the exhausting fast pace of life promotes overstimulation and overscheduling, which become chronic stressors that lead to behavioral, mood and attention disorders.”

We need to remind ourselves that life is not a race, but one determined step after another toward a concrete goal. Watch any infant taking its first steps: they keep their adorable eyes fixed upon you as they trot along on their cute, chubby little legs. Or hold hands while walking with a two year old; such a small child cannot match my characteristically brisk gait, so I must slow my pace to his or hers. Thus I’ve learned you can reach your desired destination without sprinting towards it.

2. Pay Attention

One typically thinks that adults are the ones who must impart this principle to children…I know I’ve had my fair share of redirecting children to the task at hand. But in reality, we adults need this reminder as well. It’s no secret that multi-tasking has become the norm in both our work and personal lives. In our efforts to accomplish and do more throughout the day, we’ve lost not only productivity, but also experience in engaging with one person or task for an extended period of time.

As a preoccupied population, it’s high time we took a cue from the kids and let ourselves become as engrossed as a child can be by such things as: a meaningful activity, a good story, a person that loves you. Being fully present to something or someone is a worthy attribute to acquire.

3. Be Joyful

There is a sign in every classroom at the Center that reads “sing and be silly with us daily.” And what a balm to the soul it is! My day is always better whether I’m skipping along singing “Let’s Go Fly a Kite” with a preschooler, twirling with a toddler, or playing peek-a-boo with a baby.
Yes, caring for children isn’t easy or without its trials (I have a new respect for every parent now), but the indescribable delights derived from spending time with them far outweighs the difficulties. How often do we take life too seriously and forget to see how delightful it is? So dance around in your socks, laugh at the antics of your neighborhood critters, and sing in the shower when the mood strikes you (it occurs often to me, I must confess).

4. **Cultivate a Sense of Wonder**

“In nothing is the child so righteously childlike, in nothing does he exhibit more accurately the sounder order of simplicity, than in the fact that he sees everything with a simple pleasure, even the complex things.” G.K Chesterton

Children are naturally quite adept in the art of wonder. They can take a simple occurrence and see it as an exciting affair that captures their imagination. For example, when I was outside with the preschoolers one morning, they pointed out a group of dragonflies hovering overhead that my single-minded self would never have noticed. They look at the world with shining eyes, and why shouldn’t we? Let’s stop and wonder with them.

5. **Become Selfless**

Now children aren’t exactly born with magnanimous tendencies (I learned that quickly on the job when trying to promote sharing), so they don’t teach us selflessness as much as evoke the virtue within us. When I’m caring for the children, I have to set aside my homework, time for socialization, and even physical needs (you can’t just leave a dozen kids alone for your lunch). But in the end, it’s a most beautiful and fulfilling thing to give yourself to another, which is why I am so thankful there are darling little dependents in this life that need you and me.