Being a grandparent is an exciting role that provides opportunities for creating lasting relationships that benefit both the grandparent and the grandchild. There is research evidence to document that caring adults can make a difference in children’s lives. Grandparents can be the caring adults who help children slow down and savor the joy of childhood.

We live in such a fast-paced world that kids hardly have time to be kids today. Parents work two jobs or lots of overtime, kids rush from one after school activity to another, and families seldom have time to sit down to dinner together. Time is of the essence. Being on time and meeting a deadline matters more and more. Fax machines deliver when overnight delivery is too slow. We wait impatiently when a website takes several seconds to open.

A noted expert on the effects of stress and self esteem on children’s health and achievement, Dr. Bettie B. Youngs, suggests that our grandchildren have become the unintended victims of constantly being hurried. Many of today’s parents find it easier to tie a child’s shoelaces than to wait while she ties them herself or the parent simply buys shoes with Velcro fasteners instead of taking the time to teach a basic skill.

Such hurried parents rush through everyday tasks and produce a harried child who gets the message that faster is better. Some children may feel frustrated and act out because they are unable to keep up. The pressure to grow up is stronger than ever before.

Children have always been in a hurry to grow up. There is a significant difference between wanting to grow up, which is a normal, healthy part of childhood, and having grown-up concerns forced upon a child.

Rushing through childhood has consequences. Children’s games are disappearing and being replaced by organized sports that are becoming more and more competitive at a younger age. We feel guilty purchasing toys without an educational message but play for play’s sake is important for children.

Play is important for adults as well. Time to daydream and wonder is often replaced with a full schedule of structured activities. As a grandparent, you may be in the best position to help your grandchildren discover the joy of everyday living.

One of the most effective ways to build a strong relationship with your grandchildren is to do things together. By routinely spending time together, you establish an emotional bank account that can be drawn upon when daily life becomes difficult. Keep your focus on simple activities. Give bird watching a try. Hang a bird feeder close to a window where your grandchild can observe the birds coming to feed. Go to the local library and check out a book on the types of birds which are in your area. Help your grandchild make a chart to list the different types of birds which come to feed.

A very simple way to provide a meal for the birds is to put food on a string. Using a
piece of string about 16 inches long, thread one end of the string through a large needle and tie several knots in the opposite end. String unshelled peanuts, apple slices or other fruit, and tie it to a tree branch. The birds (and squirrels) will reward you with a circus act, swinging like acrobats as they try to eat the food.

The next time your grandchild stays over, awaken him early for an adventure. Pack a breakfast snack and a pair of binoculars to take a walk in your neighborhood. Tune in to the sights and sounds that will soon be taken over by the hustle and bustle of people and vehicles. The simplest efforts on your part can expand your grandchild’s understanding of the world around them, boost your grandchild’s self esteem, and create memories that will last a lifetime.

Children are not little adults and should not be hurried through childhood. The activities and experiences of childhood prepare a child for adulthood. Children need direction and support to develop into secure individuals. Children need to feel they belong. Children learn how to cope with the problems they will face in life from caring adults.

As you spend time with your grandchildren and talk with your adult children, encourage them to slow the pace. Learn to savor and enjoy the children in your family.