

April 2021 Issue 9

The We Turned Out Okay Playbook

by Karen Lock Kolp, M.Ed.

Doing what works for you and your family...

Though it may not be the conventional path. Let's jump in!

Using Modeling to Move Toward What You Really Want to See in the World

Welcome to Issue 9 of the *We Turned Out Okay Playbook*!

Years ago I got into a pretty serious altercation with my oldest son's second grade teacher.

It was about spelling.

As an educator, I knew that people learn things like spelling in all different ways. Some do well with what's called phonics, and others do well with something called whole language learning.

If you think of phonics and whole language at either end of a very wide spectrum, most of us fall somewhere in the middle. We tend more towards whole language – taking in text and print from our environment and metabolizing it, almost as if learning by osmosis – or more toward phonics, which is using clues within a sentence, word, or syllable to decode print.

Most of us combine phonics and whole language into our own unique way of learning.

Years after this altercation, when I became a homeschooling parent, I would learn that there's no set curriculum. That it's perfectly okay for children to not learn to read even until they are nine or 10 years old, because when they are ready, they'll dive in. That we come into this world with a certain kind of wiring, and we do best when that wiring is allowed to light up in its own time. (We must be immersed in a print-rich environment for that to happen, with plenty of emphasis on the importance of reading, of course.)

After working and coaching with more and more parents and families, these ideas have combined for me into a kind of self-directed learning.

But on this day some 15 years ago, I had not learned those lessons yet.

2 Nor was Max's teacher in that self-directed place, as we spoke on the phone that day. She told me that there was only one way to learn to spell, and that way was to learn the words correctly the first time.

While I'm sure that is true for some people, I wondered: what's the point of being able to spell perfectly, when all meaning is lost for a child? There's so much else in the world to spend energy on than perfect spelling. The only reason to spell perfectly is because the child really wants to.

I understand that this changes as children grow. At some point, in order to be considered intelligent and taken seriously, only a finished, polished document will do. But even at that point the first draft can, perhaps must, be full of errors. It's most important to get the meaning first and then go back and fix things like spelling. As author Anne Lamott says, "the only way I can get anything done is by starting with a really shitty first draft."

I was seeing big problems in my kid at this point. Early on in second grade, even with this wonderful teacher who worked hard at the beginning of the year to build community, the meaninglessness of Max's schoolwork caused him to have a truly adverse reaction to school.

This was not the first time we'd seen this. Through much of kindergarten and all of first grade Max was sickened by the essential dichotomy of school. They kept making him do work he wasn't invested in, and at the same time stopped him from spending time on those activities that were compelling to him (like time with friends and open-ended play).

The result was night terrors; weight loss; a migraine diagnosis at six years old.

These were much bigger concerns than whether he spelled words perfectly. I imagine that this teacher would have agreed with that, but the bottom line was that she had a job to do. (Later, when Max struggled with math facts, this same teacher told him "I don't really love to clean the toilet either, but it's something that I have to do. Just like math for you.")

Somewhere in this conversation I got angry. Though I knew that I might be losing the teacher's support, I just couldn't stand the thought of Max's life being in service to the 3R's. Wasn't it supposed to be the other way around?

I said, "I used inventive spelling, and I'm one of the best spellers that I know."

She did not have a response to that.

And while I feared that she would come to see me as an interfering, former-teacher-mom, I'm glad I spoke up. I went to bat for my kid, and while in the short term he was stuck doing these spelling tests, within a very few weeks of that conversation we pulled him out of school and began homeschooling.

It's as if that conversation with the teacher was a last straw for me. That was the point at which I started looking around and wondering, what else could we be doing to support our son.

Max never knew I fought for him in this way.

Yet it was modeling for him.

I modeled how to stand up to authority, gently yet firmly.

I modeled working toward what you want to see in the world, even if you're not quite sure what that will look like.

Ultimately, Max got back his health and well-being as a result. He is a thriving 20-year-old whose life is filled with meaning and motivation. That makes my heart sing <3

There's a coda to this story, one I nearly forgot about until I began writing this essay (as I say, the events that I share here took place more than 15 years ago.)

A few weeks after our conversation about spelling, we had our parent-teacher conference. Max's teacher shared her very real concerns about Max, his development, and what she observed in the classroom. "I thought he was going to be a leader back in September. Now he just seems so anxious and unhappy," she told me.

I took a deep breath and told her that we were thinking about homeschooling. I expected that a teacher in the public school system would be angry or upset about that, but instead Max's teacher loved the idea for him.

She told me she lived next door to a family of homeschooled children, she had loved watching them develop. "That kind of individualized instruction would be great for Max, although we would miss him in class."

She told me she'd be happy to help me navigate the school system's requirements for transitioning to homeschooling.

Max's teacher followed through on that offer, and made me feel so supported through this transition.

She also gave Max one last gift, while modeling kindness, generosity, and community-building for us all.

A few weeks into homeschooling, Max's teacher visited us here at home. She brought with her cards, letters, and drawings from the kids in Max's class. She told him "We are glad you're homeschooling but we miss you! So we made you a whole care package of stuff from your friends at school."

Max was overjoyed – homeschooling was definitely the right path for him, but he was missing his friends! And here was a way for him to keep in touch, and an illustration of how much they loved him.

I'm so thankful to Max's teacher for understanding what he needed, and helping me get that for him.

I'm also grateful to her for recognizing that though he wasn't going to be a part of her class, homeschooling was a meaningful alternative. She knew he wasn't motivated by schoolwork, but that he could be with homeschooling.

Finally, I'm most grateful to her for modeling what it looks like to build community.

That she would support Max even though he was no longer her student – that makes my heart sing too!

What are you modeling? How can you put that in service for you and your family?

Let's find out!

April 2021 At-a-Glance & Calendar Expansion

Where do the 3R's – Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic – become meaningful and motivating for you? I encourage you to think on that as you go through this month's *Playbook*!

This month we look at putting the 3R's in service of three crucial areas:

- Meaning – what is meaningful to a child, and why is that important?
- Motivation – what will help that child learn?
- Modeling – what can we do (as opposed to say) that will help?

The way I see it meaning, motivation, and modeling are the keys to your child's happiness and education (and yours too! How cool!)

You'll finish out the month creating a Family Statement to help you remember what most matters to you and your family.

Happy April – Enjoy!

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
4. What's it mean to make meaning?	5. Spending this week investigating the making of meeting!	6.	7.
11. What do we find motivating?	12. You'll spend this week investigating your own motivation and that of your family!	13.	14.
18. How does modeling work?	19. What is, and isn't, modeling? You'll look at that this week!	20.	21.
25. Creating a Family Statement	26. Jot thoughts here...	27. And/or see Playsheet 2 on page 19!	28.

Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Ideas
1. One meaningful thing.	2. High/Low/Hero/Funny (a sneaky way to explore motivation :)	3. One way to model self-care	
8.	9.	10.	
15.	16.	17.	
22.	23.	24.	
29. Reflecting back on April...	30. What will you take into May?	M1	

Let's jump into April 2021!

April 1: One meaningful thing...

Meaning can mean so much. Sometimes it can be hard to sift out what one finds meaningful, so prior to spending a whole week on the subject, let's do a quickie exercise:

Without overthinking it – in fact in a completely spur-of-the-moment way – answer the following question... “What’s meaningful in my life?”

Write, doodle, or draw about your response here:

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April 2: Play the *Playbook's* favorite game today, High/Low/Hero/Funny!

The corresponding Playsheet is on page 18. After you've written everyone's responses, look back at them. Do they give an idea into what you and your family members find meaningful?

April 3: What's one way to model self-care? Do that today.

Week 1**April 4:** What does it mean, to “make meaning?”

Share your preliminary thoughts on this meta-level topic in the space below:

April 5: Meaning can mean making connections.

What are some connections you’ve noticed recently that were meaningful? Today, think on connections you have noticed while reading or watching something. Did it help you find the solution to a problem in your own life?

Share about that here:

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April 6: Meaning can mean spending time with people you love.

How could you spend time with someone you love today?

April 7: Meaning can mean spending time all by yourself.

Alone time need not be lonely time. Today, spend a little time all by yourself – no podcast in your ears, no media in your eyes, no child distracting you away from yourself. How do you feel afterwards?

April 8: Meaning can mean spending time indoors.

Do you have a favorite room in your home? A favorite chair? A favorite space to work on a hobby? Today, take some time and soak up the great indoors!

April 9: Meaning can mean spending time outdoors.

Are you a fan of grass, trees, the sky, the sun or the moon? Spend some time outside today, even if at a window or on a balcony sniffing the fresh air. Even if it's just for a little while. Outdoor time can make us feel good – and feeling that way helps us see more creative solutions to the challenges we face.

We can also feel exhilarated and “inexplicably” happy! Get some of that in your life today.

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April 10: Looking back at this past week... Where did you find the most meaning?

What about your kids – what did you observe in them about how they make meaning or what they find meaningful? (Did the 3Rs come into your thinking at all?) Write, doodle, or draw about that here, and/or in the box below:

I found meaning in...	My kids found meaning in...	My thoughts after a week of considering "meaning" ...

Week 2

April 11: What do you and your family find motivating? Share your preliminary thoughts in this space:

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April 12-14: Noticing what family members find motivating... For these next few days, observe. Notice what everyone – including you – gravitates toward. Share your thoughts in this space...

April 15-17: Limits we place on ourselves (and our family)... Looking back over the last few days of observation: did you find yourself feeling judgmental about what motivated you? Or what motivated family members?

Keep that Motivation Observer Hat on over these next few days. This time, look in a judgment-free way. For example instead of hearing a critical voice in your head when you notice your child is motivated by “screen time and nothing else,” try seeing that through fresh eyes. *Why* is it so motivating to them? Knowing the answer to that will help you in building their life to include screens but not be ruled by them.

Share your thoughts over these few days here:

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Mid-Month Check-in

Looking back over the last few weeks, what strikes you about anything you’ve written so far? Are there any common themes or patterns that you recognize? Share about them in the space below, whether in writing, drawing, or doodling:

Common themes, patterns, other insights...

Week 3

April 18: What is modeling and how does it work? That's what we're exploring this week! For today, use this space to journal on your feelings regarding the answers to the questions of what modeling is, and how it might work:

April 19: "Do as I say, and not as I do." Discuss:

April 20: In thinking deeply on what you model, have you noticed any part of your behavior reflected back in your kids? Today, think on any potential positives that have translated from you, to them...

April 21: Continuing to think deeply on what you model: what potential negatives do you notice? Write, draw, or doodle about them here:

(Remember as you go through this exercise, “sunlight is the best disinfectant.” We cannot make changes until we know what we’re actually seeing. Many hugs from me as you do this difficult work. It will be worth it :)

April 22-24: What changes might you make? If you’ve noticed any behaviors that you are accidentally modeling, and not in a good way, spend these next few days tweaking what you model.

For example, I can model anxiety about the future with my kids. “Don’t end up dead in a ditch,” I used to cheerily say to my son as he drove off... Thinking it was funny. But really it brought the energy of accidents and pain! So instead I’ve taught myself to simply say “Travel safe. I’ll see you when you get back!”

That way neither of us are worrying about the negatives. Instead I send him off with good vibes. I’ve noticed positive changes in both of us just by making this simple shift.

14 What can that look like for you? Share in the space below:

Week 4

April 25: Creating a Family Statement!!

This week you’ll combine Meaning, Motivation, and Modeling – all you’ve noticed or learned in recent weeks – into a Family Statement.

For today, sit back and enjoy your actual family. Take true enjoyment and comfort in being together, without judgment, but instead in acceptance and joy.

April 26-28: What is a Family Statement?

It can be a simple one-liner, expressing who your family is at the core. It can be snarky, it can be sincere, it can be funny or serious. (The one we've settled on: "We're not crazy – we're the Kolps!" It encompasses our affirmation that as a family, we do what's right for us, regardless of how peculiar it may seem to the world at large. We each know we've got each other's back, and that feels SO good.)

Think of your Family Statement as your way of summing up this entity that you've created. However the Family Statement works for you is great!

What's motivating to you, and others in your family? What is being modeled, what's being reflected back?

Use the Playsheet on page 19 for help in crafting your Statement.

Use this space to draft your Family Statement:

Once you've got it, write it in this space below:

April 29: Reflecting back on this month... What's been most helpful to you in this month's *Playbook*?

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April 30:

End-of-the-Month Roundup

Reflecting back, looking forward! **What will you use and remember, from this epic month of parenting?** Share your thoughts in the box below:

I will use and remember...



And get ready for May's *Playbook*! It's going to be a great month!

Playsheets

If you know me, you'll know I'm not a fan of worksheets. But I really wanted you to have a place to collect your thoughts in a worksheet kind of way, so I developed these Playsheets instead!

Playsheet 1: High/Low/Hero/Funny... In each issue of the *Playbook* we play this family game, where everyone shares about the best thing that happened to them that day, the toughest thing about that day, and who was a kindness hero for them that day – and/or, what entertaining or funny thing happened?

We play this game each and every month so you can enjoy looking back on your child's highs, lows, heroes and funnies over your *Playbook* subscription! This gives you a record over time so you can see how they change and grow.

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Family Member	High	Low	Hero	Funny

Playsheet 2 – Family Statement

Use this Playsheet as you begin thinking about your Family Statement, and then return to page 16 to put it in writing!

What is motivating to us?	What is being modeled in our home?	How is that reflected back to me?
(Use these columns to organize your	thoughts...)	
(Use these blocks to think on	what aspects of the above would be	useful in your Statement...)

Ask the ~~Child-Development Expert~~ Life Quester

I have been thinking about what the last year or so has changed...

What I notice is that as hard as the pandemic has been, it's also been a time of learning, growth, and the chance to gain a better understanding of what is meaningful to me. I've seen this learning in several areas: as a parent, as a leader, as a spouse and friend, as myself.

The Life Quester part of me recently asked a question, one I found super enlightening!

So I'm going to ask it here, give you my response, and then invite you to think on this question, too.

I hope it's an interesting and useful exercise!

Here's the question: What are you willing to struggle for?

20 My response: I'm willing to struggle to build my life how I want it. This includes my dream coaching practice with *Playbook* subscribers and clients who are willing to go deep, understand their dreams – and work toward making them reality.

My dream coaching practice is the key to living in financial freedom, time freedom, and location freedom (with Ben :) It means filling my life with exhilaration, both physically with things like swimming, hiking, and skiing, as well as mentally... I get to help and serve. I get to live in exhilaration instead of fear.

Ultimately I must be willing to struggle to understand my own value and worth. That's the key to everything. Once I understand that what I create is valuable, and that who I am in my very core is valuable and worthy, everything changes.

I no longer need worry about what others think. And I don't need anyone's "praise," I don't need to be a people pleaser, as long as I am pleasing myself. As long as I live in integrity and connect with my people, I don't need to be beholden in any praise-like way to anyone. That feels so good!

Understanding what I’m willing to struggle for means that I get to build the life that I really, really want. It’s a life includes peace and fun, exhilaration, Ben, my kids, loved ones and friends... And a committed tribe of people who I get to serve and help. It’s awesome!

Dear reader, what are you willing to struggle for?

Use this chart to help you map it out.

	1.
	2.
	3.
	4.
	5.
	6.
	7.
Thoughts... conclusions...	... Insights...

Hello from The Dream HQ

The column where each month we visit a wonderful place for mindfulness and relaxation: Karen's Dream Headquarters.

We step into the glade of the Dream HQ, and we take in the view:

The first, tiny beginnings of spring have begun in the gardens, woods, and fields here.

Everywhere we look we see hints of the coming season. Crocuses poking up through leaf mulch; buds emerging on trees; a fresh smell of spring in the air.

The North Woods are on our right, Long Lake is ahead, and the Big House is to our left. We are drawn toward the gardens of the Big House, which extend all the way along around the side and into the back.

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As we walk along in the garden, these signs of spring persist. While most of the gardens are bedded down for the winter just past, a few early plants are poking up. The aforementioned crocuses seem to be everywhere along the side of the Big House, and the clematis vine is just beginning to extend budded tendrils. We know that in a short few weeks those buds will be growing. Those tendrils will be climbing up and over the wooden structures built by the Dream HQ's occupants, Joy and Honey. If there's one thing they love in spring, it's to sit beneath a canopy of countless purple clematis flowers!

As we work our way around to the back of the Big House, we've got a choice: the entrance to a hedge maze beckons the right, and a large beautiful greenhouse calls us straight ahead.

The Big House kitchens are at this end of the house. While the maze would be super interesting, our curiosity is drawn by a sign that says "Greenhouse Kitchen Garden this way!"

How can we resist? It's still a little chilly out here anyway... We will save the maze for another visit. Once we decide that, we step into the greenhouse.

The smells of delicious herbs immediately greet our nose.

There are entire sections of the greenhouse dedicated to Italian, Greek, Middle Eastern, African, Indian, and Asian cooking. There's like 10 kinds of basil in here! As well as oregano, coriander, ginger root, chili peppers, and so many other plants that we can't possibly identify them all.

And then, there are the flower beds. As we wander through the greenhouse we leave the Kitchen Garden section and enter a world of the most beautiful flowers. Freesia, roses, a wealth of flowers that we don't even know what kind they are, just that they're beautiful. There are even orange and lemon trees, with both blooms and fruit!

It's a wealth of scents and sights that restores our soul.

There is a sign inviting us to "Try an orange... They're delicious!"

And so we do. It's maybe the best orange we've ever had.

We sit in a cozy chair and enjoy our orange; it's so peaceful and lovely here.

We know that whenever we need a boost, whenever we need the beauty of nature, the bounty of flowers, the delightful smell and flavor of herbs, they are available to us here, now and always.

All we need to do is close our eyes and step into the Dream HQ.

What's coming up in the May *Playbook*?

Children's mistruths and lies and what to do about them!

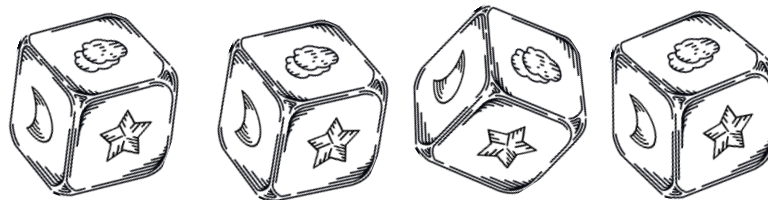
What should you do when your child lies – or catches you in a lie?
How might you explain "little white lies" and the different ways that people are truthful... or not?

If truth and lies are on your mind, you will love this upcoming issue...

Coming soon, right into your mailbox!

Have a great April and we will see you next month!

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