

March 2021 Issue 8

The We Turned Out Okay Playbook

by Karen Lock Kolp, M.Ed.

Living and thriving no matter the circumstances...

You can do this. Let's get started!

The Strength of Knowing Your Strengths

Welcome to Issue 8 of the *We Turned Out Okay Playbook*!

It's been a month of seeing the strength in each of my kids.

But before the strengths could show themselves, the challenges came first...

In Jay, my 16-year-old (who gave permission for me to tell this story) the challenges have been all around screens, and tech time.

Starting last November when Jay was isolating due to a Covid exposure, some pretty bad habits around screen time were developing.

Required to stay in his tiny square bedroom 24/7 for two weeks, we knew he wasn't getting through that without screens.

He video-conferenced with everyone – including us – using his computer, or his phone. Classes were all virtual. Seeing friends and entertaining himself were all virtual.

Often this was a good thing; twice a week he did an hour's exercise with his Uncle Dan, out in Portland. They used the workouts in a website called Fitness Blender, one of Uncle Dan's favorites for years.

But it wasn't all good. Bad habits were getting developed, too.

Jay began watching stuff while eating meals, which had never happened before.

He didn't sleep well, as he would be up late into the night (or even into the early morning) messaging with friends.

His wrists and forearms began bugging him because of all the mouse-use. It got so bad that he needed to stop playing the bass, and also needed to stop playing video games.

Jay started getting nosebleeds because he wasn't drinking enough liquid each day.

He began having anxiety attacks, which at first we attributed to the isolation. Not the screen time. "When he is done with the isolation, all will be better because he'll be back to normal. Well, pandemic normal anyway." Ben and I told each other that often.

But throughout December and January, Jay didn't get better despite the isolation ending, year-end celebrations, and the start of skiing.

He didn't eat meals with us, citing a teen's need for alone time. In fact he often didn't eat meals at all, just because he couldn't find the motivation to come out and get food.

Jay did not like the experience of skiing in Covid, and eventually made the decision to not go skiing. He missed his friends, he missed hanging out in the lodge; he just couldn't find the camaraderie that that we usually associate with skiing.

Those few times he did go, Jay ended up in the car, by himself, watching (of course) a screen.

Over these months Ben and I knew something was wrong. But we weren't sure what to do. Was this his way of dealing with the pandemic? We didn't want to force him for example to come to meals, because we wanted to see him only if he himself wanted to come to a meal. As a teenager, we really wanted those kinds of decisions to be up to him.

We tried some extremely small fixes, putting a hard stop on his daily screen time for example – but not a hard start time. Which usually meant that as soon as Jay woke up in the morning he was on his phone or computer, more or less continually until that hard stop at night.

This continued all throughout January, when his schooling was remote. Come February he perked up quite a bit because school became in-person again (Jay attends a small alternative high school, which meets in person four days a week.)

But the anxiety attacks, while better, weren't gone. And he needed almost continual nagging to do basic things like chores, cleaning up after dinner, showering, washing his hair. I found myself making threats: "If you cannot take care of your long hair, it will have to get cut."

One night in early February Ben had enough.

Jay had failed to do his chores of cleaning and vacuuming; he had been wearing the same shirt for several days; he was always "going to do" the task Dad had just asked him to do, but never quite got to the point of actually doing it.

So Ben talked to me. Together we told Jay "tomorrow this is all going to change." We instituted a rule of "only" 3 hours per day of screen time which would encompass cell phone, computer, and laptop. Within those three hours Jay would be required to do his schoolwork. It would become the only time for Jay to connect with friends or play games online. Suddenly he would have an awful lot more time in his day to be bored and have to figure out what to do.

At first Jay was dreadfully upset. Of course! We ripped that Band-Aid off, and we ripped it off hard.

There's a teacher at school that he really loves and trusts, Terry, a woman who often helps me understand what's appropriate for Jay. (For example, Terry helped me see that banning Jay's viewing of certain shows that he really wanted to watch hindered his development. She was right.) When I asked Jay "what did Terry say about the screen stuff?" He told me she'd said "Jay... Speaking as a mother, I have absolutely no sympathy for you."

That helped me to know that we were on the right track with him. That limiting screen time in this way would be good for him and was necessary.

So did Jay's reaction, after he had had some time to digest: that first night he told us that he was "relieved." That it felt good to have somebody else making the decision about when to have tech time, and when not to, in the short term.

It made for a pretty intense several days! Jay's questions really showed his thinking:

- "Why can't I make this decision for myself?"
- "What about seeing my friends?"
- "Am I an addict?"

We were patient with him. We tried to answer every question honestly: "we need to make this decision for you until you develop the habits to make appropriate decisions for yourself. Seeing friends needs to be balanced with being alone, and being comfortable with that. You are absolutely not an addict. You are learning along some new neural pathways right now, and the habits that you gain will make you strong and powerful in your life."

And we are now reaping the rewards. Or rather, Jay is now reaping the rewards – Ben and I are watching him kind of in awe.

4 Without screens to occupy his time, Jay is enthusiastic about life again. He's diving in to life and learning. He's coming alive! In four days he read all of the book they are studying in humanities, Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*.

Jay chose to do his share of snow-shoveling at night recently, and spent an extra 20 minutes outside afterward making snow angels and just sitting and looking at the sky.

He rediscovered the Nerf guns that we have here and has been amusing himself with target practice.

He cleaned his room, and keeps up with hygiene and laundry and chores. He was terrified to do these without earbuds and music. Now he's learned that he CAN do them. He doesn't need the music.

Last night at dinner he cheerfully told us that one of the biggest insights so far had to do with missing us, when he would stay in his room at dinner. He said, "I'm not going back to eating in front of a show anymore."

Jay has begun developing the strength of being present in his life. This morning he told me that, prior to the tech ban, he began bringing his phone into the bathroom! And that

he doesn't ever want to do that again. That it was just shifting the same content to a different venue, and he missed out on so much when he did that.

As you can imagine, all of Jay's stock-taking is making my heart sing!

Challenged, my child has learned his own strength. He's learned that he can make choices. He's learned what really matters to him. That there's so much more than screens.

We will spend this month taking stock of your strengths. What do you bring to the table in parenting and within yourself that will help you face your challenges and overcome them?

What strengths do you have that will help you achieve the life you dream of?

Let's find out!

March 2021 At-a-Glance & Calendar Expansion

This month we take stock of your strengths in four different areas:

- The positives you bring into the world, just by being here
- Your relationship with your kids
- The good qualities you bring to your home spaces
- Assessing what must change for you to thrive in these three areas

Once these assessments are complete, we finish out the month considering a few very simple changes you can make to bring you closer to thriving.

Happy March – Enjoy!

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
	1. Taking stock of... Positives within you	2. One attribute you like in yourself	3. Reflecting on yesterday's entry
7. Insights from this past week	8. Taking stock of... Your relationship with your children	9. What blows you away when you think of your kids?	10. What drives you nuts when you think of them?
14. Insights from this past week	15. Taking stock of... Your home spaces	16. What's most challenging regarding your home?	17. What good qualities are inherent in your home spaces?
21. Insights from this past week	22. Changes you could make in these areas	23. Reflecting once more on home spaces	24. Reflecting once more on your relationship with your children
28. Deep breath...	29. One simple action or change...	30. A second simple action or change...	31. A third simple action or change...

Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Ideas
<p>4. Another positive in you</p>	<p>5. Reflecting on that positive</p>	<p>6. A third positive within yourself</p>	
<p>11. The potential upsides of the things that drive you crazy</p>	<p>12. Putting on your Observer Hat</p>	<p>13. What did you notice with your Observer Hat on?</p>	
<p>18. What circumstances brought you to this home?</p>	<p>19. What do you wish was different in this home space?</p>	<p>20. What could you do to get some of that?</p>	
<p>25. Reflecting on you, your good qualities</p>	<p>26. Reflecting on an area of your choice</p>	<p>27. The <i>Playbook's</i> favorite game: High, Low, Hero (or High, Low, Funny – a change this month!)</p>	
<p>A1</p>	<p>A2</p>	<p>A3</p>	

Let's jump into March 2021!

March 1: This week you'll take stock of positives within yourself. So, spend today getting used to that idea.

There ARE positives within you. (Sometimes we all forget that, myself included.)

Today, whenever you catch yourself being self-critical, notice it if you can. Acknowledge it. Tell yourself "I'm sorry for thinking badly of you. Working on it!"

March 2: What's one attribute that you like in yourself? It could literally be anything from your choice of pajamas, to your love of Jane Austen books, to your ability to cook a perfect steak.

Write, doodle, or draw about your thoughts in this space:

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March 3: Reflect on yesterday's positive attribute in yourself. What thoughts come up when you look squarely at that attribute? Share in this space:

March 4: What's another positive attribute in you? Share here:

March 5: Reflecting on yesterday's positive attribute. What comes up for you today, when you think about that attribute? Why might you have chosen it? What's your favorite thing about it? Write, doodle, or draw about that here:

March 6: What's a third positive attribute in you? (I know, I keep asking for these! It's because I am confident that you have TONS of positive attributes. It's up to you to draw them out, acknowledge them, and really see them – and you – for the loveliness within.) Use this space to share about this attribute:

March 7: Looking back at all you've written and shared about yourself this week...
Share about these in the "Simple Changes" Playsheet on page 18!

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March 8: You will spend this week considering your relationship with some very important people: your kiddos!

For today, put on your observer hat and really look at these beings. Really see them.

Aren't they gorgeous, inside and out?

March 9: What blows you away about your children? Have they done anything recently that left you in awe of them? Share about this just below:

March 10: What drives you nuts about your kids? Write, doodle, or draw about it in this space:

March 11: Thinking on your response yesterday: what is the **upside** of the things that drive you crazy? (I.e., if your child is particularly stubborn, how might that serve them in their future?) Share your thinking in this space:

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March 12: Putting back on your observer hat. This time it's not about observing the kids. Instead, observe – really look at and consider – your interactions with them. What ideas come up for you when you do that? Share here:

March 13: What else did you notice? Think back to your observations of yesterday. In the intervening time, what else did you notice about these interactions? Write, doodle, or draw about this in the space below:

March 14: Looking back at all you've written and shared about your relationship with your children this week...

Share about these in the "Simple Changes" Playsheet on page 18!

Mid-Month Check-in

Looking back over the last two 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...

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March 15: This week, you'll be looking at your home spaces with a new eye.

When we are continually in the same spaces, we can so easily overlook them. Things are so mundane, so similar day-to-day, that we may not notice the good aspects of our home. Similarly, "mess creep" can occur. This is the phenomenon where (for example) a few weeks ago we put something down on the dining room table just temporarily – and it's still there. Other things accumulate, and before we know it the dining room table cannot be used to eat on anymore!

Time to look at it all with a fresh perspective. You get to do that this week :)

March 16: What are the challenges in your home spaces? Let's look at that squarely today, while continuing to be kind to yourself. It's not about judgment. It's about viewing what is actually around you, which is the only way you'll ever be able to make changes.

So, what are these challenges? Write, doodle, or draw about them in this space:

March 17: What are the good qualities in your home spaces? Share about them here:

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March 18: What circumstances brought you to this home? Often, how we come by where we live is an interesting story! Share about how you happen to live where you live:

March 19: What do you wish was different in this home space? Share your thoughts just below:

March 20: What could you do to get some of that?

Choose one tiny thing, one very small step you can take. Write that here...

And then go do it. Seriously, do it right now. Once you've done it come back and write "I did it!" just here:

March 21: Looking back at all you've written and shared about your home spaces this week...

Share about these in the "Simple Changes" Playsheet on page 18!

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March 22: You've done lots of information-gathering this month! Time to put that to use.

All this week you get to reflect on ideas for making things better in the areas of your home, your relationship with your children, and ways to be more positive with yourself.

We are going in reverse order so you will build back up to reflections on you.

For now, take a deep breath, and then give a complete exhale. Really get present with yourself. Feel the soles of your feet pressing into your shoes, snuggled up in your socks or slippers, or solidly on the floor. Really ground yourself. Finally, know how much it means that you are willing to look critically at these areas of your life! It's how you will build the future of your dreams.

March 23: What are some insights as you look around you at where you live? Write, doodle, or draw in this space:

March 24: What are some insights as you look at your kiddos? Share about those insights here:

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March 25: What new insights do you have in this moment about yourself? Take stock of them here:

March 26: Today, reflect on the area of your choice. Deep breath. What comes up for you? Share here:

March 27: Play High, Low, Hero/Funny today!

I love the idea of a “kindness hero.” But recently I learned of a family that shares high, low, funny things, and I wanted to give you that option as well!

Go to the High, Low, Hero/Funny Play sheet on page 17 to play!

March 28: Deep breath today. You’ve done an awesome job this month taking stock! You’ll spend the last few days of March building on your efforts.

But for today, be as present as you can in your life. Don’t worry about observing, analyzing, thinking critically...

Simply be. Enjoy your kids, enjoy the moment.

March 29: One simple action.

Go to the Simple Changes Playsheet on page 18.

Look at all the information there, that you gathered over this month. What one simple change can you make, to keep this great momentum going? Share about it in the Playsheet.

March 30: One simple action.

Again today, go to the Simple Changes Playsheet on page 18.

What’s another change that you can make? (Small and simple work best.) Share in the Playsheet about this change.


March 31: One simple action.

Today’s simple action: implement – actually do – one simple action.

End-of-the-Month Roundup

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

I will use and remember...



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And get ready for April the'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 now, 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.

Family Member	High	Low	Hero	Funny

Playsheet 2 – Simple Changes

Use this Playsheet as you go through the month to gather data; and then at the end of the month to plan and act on your simple changes.

Positives in Me	My Relationship with my Children	My Home Spaces
(Use these columns to gather data...)		
(Use these blocks to plan and	act on your actions...)	

Ask the Child-Development Expert

Hi Karen, I thought 2020 was hard, but 2021 seems to be even harder! I am so done. So, so done. How can I keep my own spirits up, never mind my kids!

– Pam, Mom of three children under 10

Hi Pam – In your letter you share some of the challenges that have made 2021 even tougher than 2020 for you and your family. I hope you can feel the hugs and empathy coming your way.

I chose your letter for this month's *Playbook* because, while this isn't the place to address each specific challenge, everyone has challenges and there are some practices we can put into place that work across the board.

The challenges you share come in three flavors:

1. You're bearing witness to horrible incidents in your loved ones' lives.
2. You yourself are in both mental and physical pain.
3. You are worrying about your children's education.

As I say, maybe we cannot all relate to your specific struggles. But these are three areas in which I've been hearing about many, many parents being challenged.

So, let's take this time to see what we can do to address them.

This issue is about taking stock. How does that relate to the challenges in your life?

Perhaps it's about understanding what you have control of... and what you do not. This relates to all three challenge areas. Regarding the terrible things happening in the lives of your loved ones: ask yourself, what about this can you control? Perhaps you can help your friend get some downtime by offering to do something with her. Can you talk on the phone, meet in person, or send funny and/or loving messages to each other? Probably. But you cannot make her do what *you* think she should do. That's not in your control.

Thinking about the mental and physical pain you're in: what does the doctor say? It's within your control to decide if your doctor's advice will work for you or not. If you decide it works for you, you can go do it; if not, ask that question again: what's in your control?

For more than a year now I've had an earache. I've just sort of known it was there, ignored it and wished it away... Until I woke up in the middle of the night recently and thought that my jaw was broken, it hurt so excruciatingly. It turns out that the earache and the extreme jaw pain were related, having to do with the muscles holding my jaw in place in just under my ear. When I brought up my pain with my husband, he recommended (of all things) acupuncture, which had helped him years ago with the exact same pain and sensations in his ear. Turns out this whole year, I've been clenching my jaw relentlessly! Who knew?

It was within my control to ask Ben, and then to decide whether I would take his advice and go to the acupuncturist. I did and within a few weeks I'm pain free and with a much better understanding of how to avoid clenching my jaw in the future.

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Regarding your children's education: lots of parents are concerned that their kids are falling behind. I'm encouraging folks to think counterintuitively about this, and to worry less about falling behind education-wise and more about mental health. When children feel socially and emotionally healthy, their capacity for learning opens up.

In our current state of hybrid or virtual education, children have lost a crucial sense of connection with their teachers and peers. They need us more than ever, to help them with their fears and concerns, to love them and play games with them. Once more ask yourself that question: what is in my control in this situation? You can foster their trust by being there for them. You can be a good role model, by showing them that you're a lifelong learner, and by seeing to your own physical and mental health as much as possible.

I hope that helps. HUGE hugs from me <3

– Karen

Extra Space for More Stock-Taking:)

	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:

It's a beautiful, wintry, starry night.

Over the roof of the Big House to our left we see etched out in stars a message: "All shall be well."

To our right, the North Woods are quiet and peaceful.

Straight ahead, across the snowy front garden of the Big House we see the shores of Long Lake. The lake itself looks perfect for ice-skating, with tiny lights outlining the woods and islands of the lake. They shine just brightly enough that we can see this huge lake going off into the distance, cleared of snow and beckoning us to skate.

How can we resist?

At the shore of the lake, there's a magically warm bench with a pair of skates just waiting for us.

We sit on the bench, remove our snow boots and slip on the skates. They fit perfectly, and we suddenly know that even if our skating abilities aren't that wonderful, tonight we will fly over the ice.

We stand, walk a few steps over to the ice, and pause...

It's been a bit since skating last. (For some of us this may be our very first experience ice-skating even.)

Will we be able to do this?

It's as if all the energy around us is charged with encouragement. With faith in ourselves and our abilities.

Feeling enveloped in magic, we take that first step out onto the ice. We discover that our feet are holding us up perfectly. We take that second step, and it turns into a glide... And suddenly we are skating!

It's the most freeing feeling in the world. The stars overhead, the lights ranged out along the lake shore and the islands begin to whiz by as we use our legs to gain speed.

Long Lake is so named because it's, well, very long! Tonight we see that it's dotted with islands, each lit up in fairy lights and so inviting to do figure eights around.

When we get out of breath there's always a warming bench waiting for us.

At one point we decide to try turning around and skating backwards. We take a deep breath, turn our skates in just the right way... And begin to push ourselves backwards. Again it is so freeing! Such fun!

We make our way as far as we wish on Long Lake tonight. Maybe we make it to the far shore; maybe not. It's up to us.

At just the right moment, we decide it's time to turn around and direct our feet back toward the familiar Dream HQ scenes.

Islands and their lights whiz by as we glide on home.

It's exhilarating beyond belief, and all totally within our control. Freeing and joyful.

When we return to the shore from which we first stepped onto the lake, we see a huge bonfire – all ready and built up for us!

We sit on the warming bench, we enjoy the fire and the marshmallows left out for us to toast. And the cozy warm drink on a low table right next to our seat.

We view the stars and feel that good feeling that one only gets after vigorous exercise. Exhilarated and satisfied, all at the same time.

We revel in this moment – and allow ourselves to become very peaceful.

It's quiet and lovely here, and we know that we can return anytime we wish.

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

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

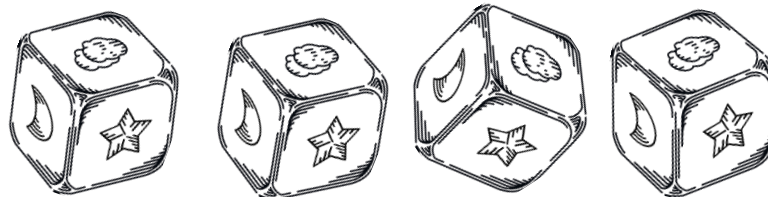
In April we toss out the 3R's – and incorporate three crucial M's into our family and children's lives! (More accurately, we put the 3R's in service to the 3M's.)

We've all seen the results of what happens when kids feel marginalized and excluded. (We've probably seen that even within ourselves!) So we will spend April investigating how to bring Motivation, Meaning, and Modeling into our home lives to make us all feel better.

Coming soon, right into your mailbox!

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

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