

July 2021 Issue 12

# The We Turned Out Okay Playbook

by Karen Lock Kolp, M.Ed.

Doing what works for you and your family...

Instead of treading the conventional path. Let's jump in!

## A Field Trip for Bugs

Welcome to Issue 12 of the *We Turned Out Okay Playbook*!

I want to share with you one of my absolute favorite ways of engaging children, and ourselves, with things that might frighten us.

To do so, I'm taking you back in time.

In 1996 I became the head teacher in the wonderful preschool program that I had the privilege of working in for nearly a decade. (If you have heard Tricia Tomaso on my show, these were the years where I was the head teacher in our classroom, and she was the Special Needs teacher in the same classroom. We had such fun!)

That spring, some children wanted to learn about bugs.

Others were terrified, couldn't imagine going near a bug. Didn't even want to think about bugs! (Much like their teacher, Mrs. Kolp.)

I wondered, how could I support both groups – the kids who had a real passion for bugs, and the ones who were so frightened they couldn't stand to be on a patch of grass once someone had mentioned there might be bugs there?

We didn't Google in those days. When I brought the idea up in a teacher meeting, one of my fellow teachers suggested: take some bugs on a field trip to your classroom!

But do it in a special way.

Prior to the bugs' visit, I told the children:

"Tomorrow will be a special day! The bugs in my backyard wanted to come on a field trip, to meet you here at school. But, their mommies and daddies were frightened. What would happen to their little bug children?"

"I told them "The kids in our class will be so kind. They always love making new friends."

"So, the mommy and daddy bugs wanted me to tell you, thank you for taking care of their little bug children!"

"We can do that, can't we?"

The kids were over the moon. Even the ones who had been frightened were now enchanted by the idea of "bug-friends" coming to visit our classroom.

Soon after came the day that I grabbed our recycling bin at home, lined it with a tarp, and dug many shovelfuls of dirt and grass out of my yard, dropping them in the recycling bin.

I loaded that, along with gardening gloves and a couple big tarps, into the back of my little hatchback and drove to school filled with fun and feeling exhilarated.

In our gathering area, we spread the tarps out and placed kid-sized gloves and gardening implements around the circle, for anyone who was intrigued but a little concerned about actually touching the bugs.

When the children came in the energy was so much fun!

We gathered together, around the recycling bin covered by a tarp, and I shared “Well, friends, here they are! All the little children bugs who wanted to come on the field trip are right inside this bin...

“But just before I invite them into our classroom, I wanted to say how excited the mommy and daddy bugs were, when they heard how safely and carefully you would take care of their children!”

And we talked a little bit about how to safely take care of the bugs.

Then... We overturned the recycling bin! Out spilled the dirt from my yard... and along with it came the bugs!

It was such fun to see the kids that day.

Every single child took so much care, and was so respectful to all the bugs they came across. Even the ones who had been frightened of bugs weren't afraid. Instead they were able to interact with these tiny creatures.

Children laughed as bugs tickled their fingers and the backs of their hands while walking on them.

Children drew pictures of the bugs that they saw.

They consulted books we had supplied, showing different sorts of bugs, worms, and spiders.

All around our circle were discussions about how to tell what sort of creature they were looking at. Again and again children asked questions about the bugs. What was this one called? What did it like to eat? Was it thirsty? Was it afraid, being apart from mommy and daddy?

Children talked to the bugs. This was the best.

“Don't worry, I won't hurt you!”

“Do you miss your mommy?”

“I will take care of you.”

“Will you be my friend?”

As a teacher of preschool age children, I brought many different sorts of play into my teaching, into our classroom, and into their world.

We played all kinds of different games.

We read wonderful stories that had us all laughing helplessly.

We even used to pretend that we were Michelangelo, painting the Sistine Chapel ceiling (guess how we did this? Yep – we put giant pieces of easel paper on the underside of our snack table : )

But the bug field trip was the most memorable. (So much so that I used it with groups during the years that I homeschooled my sons.)

I've been thinking on why. Why was it so memorable? Why does it come up for me, when I think about play, as a superb example of play's value?

The answer lies somewhere in this, that the bug field trip invites us to think seriously about play.

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Previously terrified children made friends with bugs. They let them climb on them, often without gloves, smiling and laughing and allowing themselves to bond with the creatures they had been so frightened of so recently. (Their teacher Mrs. Kolp, too.) Because of the playful way we introduced the bugs.

The bug field trip inspired curiosity and lots of questions. I wouldn't be surprised to hear that some of those preschoolers from 20+ years ago are now scientists or biologists or anthropologists, with a focus on bugs.

It helped them develop their capacity for empathy. When they were worrying about their bug-friends missing mommy and daddy, they stood in those bugs' shoes. This ability is one of the most important that human beings can develop. The survival of our species depends upon it.

Friendship, curiosity and questions replacing fearfulness, empathy. Play fosters them all.

This month, it's your chance to see what play can do for you.

Let's dive in!

## July 2021 At-a-Glance & Calendar Expansion

It's going to be a fun one! This month you'll spend time:

- Understanding why play is such a key activity for humans
- Learning about play *from* your kids
- Seeing some ways that you already play
- Honing your play practice

Plus, you'll create a special Playsheet to help you see play in a new way.

Happy July – Enjoy!

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
4. ... in these days?	5. Quotes...	6. to help you...	7. think about...
11. Sundays this month are all about playing with others : )	12. Observing...	13. kids...	14. in...
18. How are you playing with others today?	19. How do...	20. YOU play?	21. How...
25. Another opportunity to play with others	26. What would you like to play?	27. First small step	28. The ultimate expression of that play

Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Ideas
1. The most important thing to know about play	2. Assessing how much...	3. open-ended play you got...	
8. and remember...	9. the importance of play!	10. Saturdays this month are all about finding ways to play for and by yourself <3	
15. open-ended play!	16. What did you learn from your kids?	17. It's Saturday! How are you playing for and by yourself?	
22. MIGHT...	23. you play?	24. Another chance for you to play for and by yourself	
29. Second small step	30. Third small step	31. Reflecting back looking forward!	

## Let's jump into July 2021!

**July 1:** The most important thing to know about play can be summed up in the quote that I live by:

“The opposite of play is not work. It is depression.” – Brian Sutton-Smith

I bring that up first because it can be so easy to be disdainful of play. So easy to place ourselves and our play last on the list. That's a dangerous road! This month, we're beginning from this place so we can get serious about play.

Play Part 1: How much? Also quotes!

**July 2:** How much open-ended play do you get in a day?

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Today and for the next two days, take a measurement. See how much open-ended play you get each day, and come and write your responses in here! What's open-ended play? It is a playful activity or hobby that we choose. Not something we do because of anybody else's choice, just ours.

On Friday, July 2 I got this much open-ended play...

**July 3:** On Saturday, July 3 I got this much open-ended play...

**July 4:** On Sunday, July 4 I got this much open-ended play...



**July 5:** All this week: Quotes! To help you think about, and remember, the importance of play : )

Record your thoughts on each quote, and/or play in general, in the space provided each day... Here is today's:

“Do what makes you oh so happy.” – Brett Wilson

**July 6:** “It is a happy talent to know how to play.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson

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**July 7:** “This kitchen is for dancing.” – Seen in Pinterest

**July 8:** “We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.” – George Bernard Shaw

**July 9:** “Play is the highest form of research.” – Albert Einstein

**July 10:** Today – and each Saturday remaining this month – set aside some time to play for and by yourself. Record about what you did, and how it went and what you might do differently next time, here:

**10 July 11:** This and every Sunday remaining in the month are all about playing with others... Each Sunday you’ve got the chance to choose your playmates, and play together :-). Keep in mind that playing High/Low/Hero/Funny in Playsheet 1 on page 17 counts!

Jot down here what you did, how it went, and what you might do differently next time:

Play Part 2: What kids can teach us about open-ended play

**July 12:** What can kids teach us about open-ended play? A lot, if we let them!

All this week, observe your children in open-ended play. Share anything you’d like about what they did, how it was open-ended, who they played with, and what

happened... Do this each day from today (Monday) through Thursday 7/15 – put on your observer hat and see what you can learn!

Write, draw, or doodle about today's open-ended play:

**July 13.** Another day for your observer hat... Write, doodle, or draw about your children's open-ended play here:

**July 14.** What are those kiddos doing in an open-ended play way today? Share about it right here...

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**July 15:** Once more, observe your children in open-ended play and share about how they did it, with whom, and any other observations you've got right here:

Tomorrow you'll look back at the data you've collected these last few days.

For now let's pause for a...

## 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...

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**July 16:** Looking back over the last few days in which you observed your children in open-ended play:

What did you learn from your kids? How might you incorporate aspects of their play into your life?

**July 17:** Happy Saturday – time to get out and play all by yourself! Then come back and share here about what you did, how it went, what you might do differently next time...

**July 18:** Play-with-others-Sunday... Enjoy yourself along with other people today! And then come back and this below about the following: Who did you play with? What did you do? Was it fun? What might you do differently next time?

Play Part 3: How you play now... How you could play in the future

**July 19:** What are some of your favorite ways to play right now? Think on this today... And then come on back and think on it a little more tomorrow : )

**July 20:** What are some other of your favorite ways to play right now? As yesterday, write, doodle, or draw about this in the space below:

**July 21:** Today, and for the next few days, you are invited to think on a new question:

How MIGHT you play? If you could go anywhere in the world to play, where would it be? Share just here:

**July 22:** How MIGHT you play? If you could try any activity, what would it be? Share just here...

**July 23:** How MIGHT you play? If you could choose any playmate in the whole wide world, who would it be? Share just here...

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**July 24:** Happy Saturday! How are you playing for and by yourself today? Share about what you did, how it went, and what you might do differently in this space:

**July 25:** Last opportunity to play with others this month... What did you do? Where did you go (if anywhere)? Who were you with? Share about it all here:

### Play Part 4: Honing your play practice

**July 26:** Combining thought with action this week... See also Playsheet 2 on pg 18

What would you like to play? What activities come to mind? Can you see yourself actually doing this kind of play? Doodle, write, or draw about your thoughts in this space:

**July 27:** The first small step.

Yesterday you gave thought to what you really REALLY enjoy playing... Today, envision the very first step you might take to be able to play that. What is it? Could you do it? Can you do it today?

**July 28:** Regarding what you'd like to play... What is the ultimate expression of that play? What's the pinnacle? Could you reach it if you tried?

(Here's a story to help you understand what I'm talking about... 2 months ago I wrote in my journal "I want to coach from a tree house!" As I looked back in my journal today I realized that, though I'd forgotten that I had written down this desire to bring this playful element into my coaching, I have now accomplish that. For me the ultimate expression of coaching is to incorporate play. Realizing I'd already coached from a tree house – our treehouse, the one in our backyard – felt so thrilling.)

How could you reach the pinnacle, the ultimate expression, of the kind of play you'd really REALLY love? Share your thoughts below...

**July 29:** The second small step. What’s another small step you can take to reach your ultimate in play?

**July 30:** The third small step.

Because you never know until you try!

**July 31:** Reflecting back, looking forward!

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### End-of-the-Month Roundup

**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 August’s *Playbook*! It’s going to be a great month!



## Playsheets

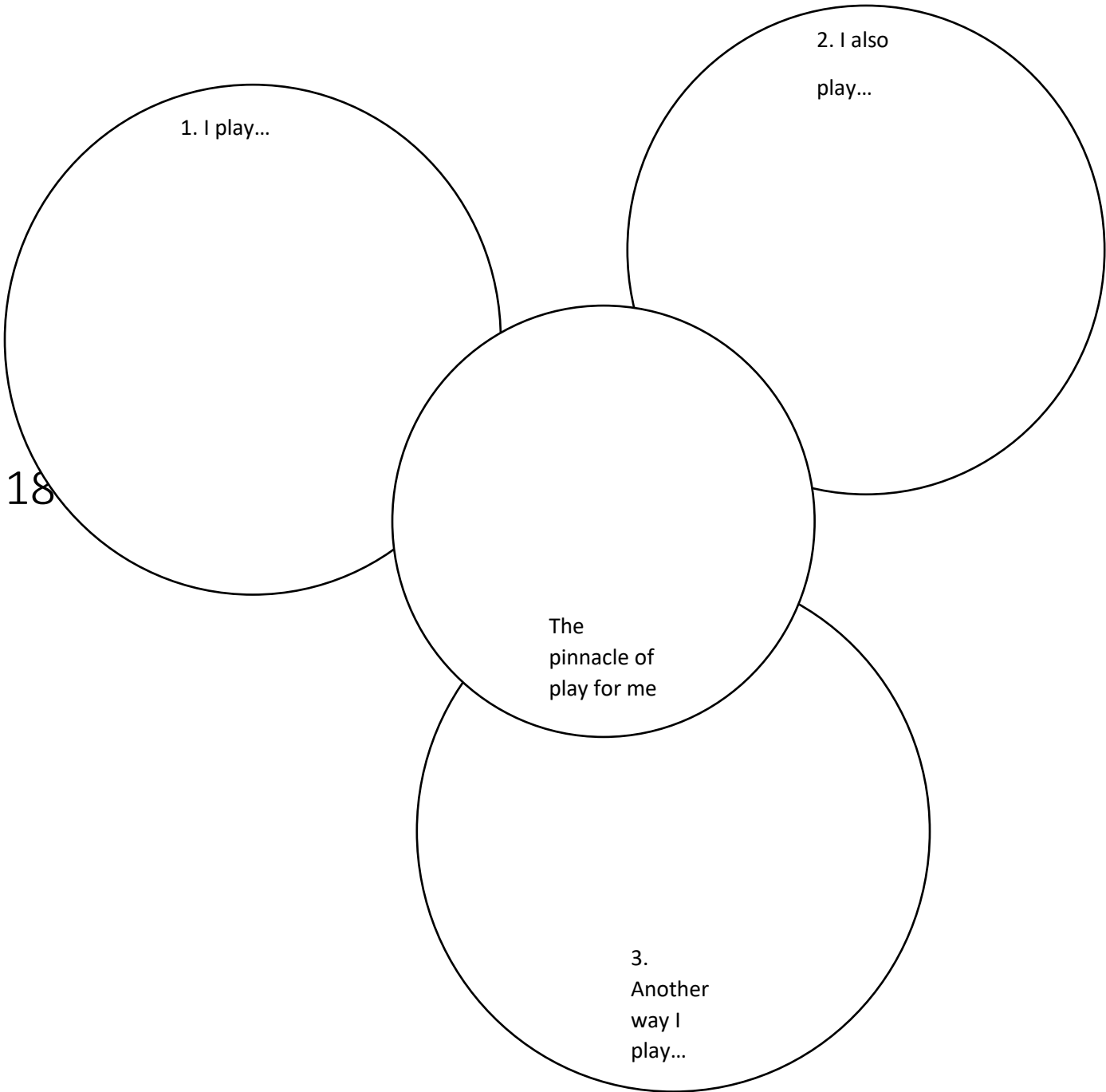
If you know me, you'll know I'm not a fan of worksheets. But I really wanted you to have a place to collect your thoughts in a worksheet kind of way, so I developed these Playsheets instead!

**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.

Family Member	High	Low	Hero	Funny

**Playsheet 2 – How I Play (for use during Part 4 of this month’s calendar)**



## Ask the Child Development Expert

**“Is it okay for my child to play alone, so much? I am fine with open-ended play but now that we’re back to some kind of normal, [my six-year-old] doesn’t want to play with other kids anywhere near as much as he did before the pandemic. I don’t know if I should be concerned or not. Thanks for your help!”**

– Amy, Mom of 1

Hi Amy! First of all, huge hugs... So much of this transitional time feels uncertain and scary. If that’s how you’re feeling – and it sounds like maybe it is – I completely understand.

I’m curious about the situation. Have you gotten your son out into the world, for playground, playdate, or beach time with friends? And if so is this when you’ve noticed that he’s less playful? Or, did he used to beg and beg to see others and now he’s happier and settled within himself?

These are both perfectly normal reactions to the way we have been living during the pandemic. It’s possible that your son has learned to be content with himself as his only playmate (or perhaps he’s co-opted you more frequently than he used to.)

My suggestions: 1. Ask him. “Hey, I’ve noticed that you’re playing differently now. What’s going on?” Six-year-olds can be more insightful than we might think.

2. Spend some time being gentle as you bring him back out into the world. It may be a matter of building up a tolerance to other people. I know it’s been that way for me!

3. Honor his need for on-his-own playtime. Sometimes it's developmental, and sometimes a pandemic arrives and throws everything out of whack. Either way it seems like your son is into playing, in a healthy open-ended way, by himself.

The pandemic changed us all. If it's given your son a different perspective on play, and a different way to play, maybe that's not a bad thing.

Finally, this may be a question for the pediatrician as well as a human development expert... Your son's pediatrician will know him well. She'll be able to give you insight into this and other changes, and help you know whether they are within normal range.

Cheers! I hope that helps!

– Karen

Dear reader, what challenges are you facing right now?

Use this chart to help you map out the challenges and what you could do about them.

	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 is hot and sunny, with something celebratory in the air.

Maybe it's the streamers and ribbons, blowing in the wind on the beach of Long Lake.

Maybe it's the exuberance of Honey the flying horse, as they spread their amazing wings, leap into the air neighing as if in laughter, and return to the ground to gallop around us. They are just so happy and our heart warms to see them.

22 Maybe it's the aura around Joy as she sits on a larger-than-life deck chair, that fits her perfectly, studying some interesting shapes on the beach.

What is she looking at? We decide to move closer, passing the Big House and its lovely summertime gardens on the left, and passing the entrance to the North Woods on the right.

As we get closer we see that many of the ribbons and streamers have writing on them... "Sand Castle Exposition Today!"

We also see lots of other people. This is rare in the Dream HQ, when there are people other than just us here. It's awesome! Especially as we recognize many of these people as our friends and loved ones. Joy and Honey brought them here to enjoy the Sand Castle Exposition, along with us.

What fun to have our loved ones along in this dream today! We take as much time as we wish to hug, and greet, and catch up with these dear people.

There are about 10 sand sculptures for us to check out as we stroll along the beach. And the cool thing is, the sculptors are there as well, to share about their visions and answer questions such as “how did you do that?”

We look at and enjoy each and every sand sculpture. The Internet and computers and stuff don’t work here in the Dream HQ, so we realize that in order to remember these, we will need to make them very detailed in our mind.

We take some time to do that now. One sand sculpture, at least 10 feet tall, is in the shape of a swimming mermaid... and the sculptor tells us that it’s of the dream she once had, of herself as a mermaid, swimming free in the sea.

Another uses pigmented sand and was sculpted in the shape of a gigantic rainbow. The sculptor invites us to “go under the arch of the rainbow, holding your biggest dream in your mind, this will help that dream come true!”

We are loving being present in this moment to enjoy the sculptures, truly looking at each, recognizing the genius of the sculptor and keeping these shapes in our mind’s eye.

Placed here and there are lemonade stands, tables of fresh orange slices, and fair food like fried dough and gigantic doughnuts. It’s awesome! (That seems to be the word of the day : )

We spend lots of time here, just the perfect amount of time in fact. We sit in the shade and speak with the sculptors and our loved ones; we swim; we come back for another pass under the rainbow sand sculpture.

All the while knowing that this beautiful day, with the most important people in our lives and the playful nature of sand, beach, and fun, are here within us whenever we wish to return.

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

## What's coming up in the August *Playbook*?

With many areas in the US and world opening up as the pandemic eases, August means the beginning of a busy season for parents. Schools are reopening; sports and other afterschool activities are resuming; traffic jams are picking back up.

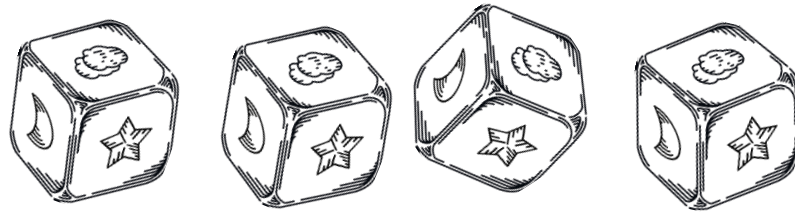
So in August we will address this. We will tackle how to take care of ourselves, even in busy times.

Here's the mantra we will begin with: "Self-care isn't selfish."

Coming soon, right into your mailbox...

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

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