

Handling a Flurry of Snow Day Stress



Remember the excitement that we had as children after hearing a forecast for snow? Even a casual mention of it unleashed a sense of freedom, adventure, and wonder, and had us in a heightened state of anticipation for the joy of a snow day. Yet for working adults, joy is typically one of the last things we associate with snow forecasts.

Think of how we adults now refer to snow days ... references to “threats of snow,” “winter storms,” and “inclement weather.” With labels like that, it is easy to understand that snow days do not hold quite the same magic and appeal for us that they used to. In fact, for many working adults, snow days cause anxiety, frustration, stress, and even financial concerns.

A most basic concern is often one of safety. If we live in an environment that does not typically get a lot of snow, we may not feel confident in our ability to drive in it. This may cause us to worry not only about our personal safety, but also about the potential costs that could be incurred if we get stranded or in an accident. Thus, the commute to work on a snowy day can trigger some anxious thoughts.

Adding to concerns about safety, we may worry about our job. If there is an expectation that we report to work despite the weather conditions, will there be negative consequences if we don't? We may be frustrated if we have to use personal/vacation time to cover our absence, or concerned that we lose regular pay for time missed. Also, we may worry about how our boss perceives our absence – will they think that we are not committed to the job; that we are lazy, or that other employees are more loyal? And we may feel guilty about the impact that our absence has on our coworkers.

For working parents, snow days create child care challenges when schools or day care facilities close and children are too young to be left at home alone. Couples often have to scramble to change their work schedule, take time off, or make alternative arrangements. Even parents who have the ability to work remotely may find it difficult to do so while staying home with a child. Depending upon the age of the child, the parent may have responsibilities related to direct care and supervision that make completing work tasks unrealistic. (Not to mention if a child has expectations about being entertained by the parent who is home!)

While none of us are able to control the weather, there are several things we can do to control or reduce our snow day stress. And most of it involves being proactive.

Be informed and assertive...

Take time to understand your employer's inclement weather policy (as well as your child care provider's policy) and your supervisor's specific expectations and areas of flexibility. If you anticipate needing special accommodations during a snow event, assertively communicate them with the parties involved, so that you can collaborate on a plan and so that everyone knows what to expect. (Parties may be more accommodating if they understand your dilemma and needs in advance.)

Be deliberate in managing your allotted time off...

If it is not unusual for your area to get a couple snow events each year, factor the possibility in as you manage your vacation/personal time. Perhaps consider saving one or two days of your personal time in case you need it to cover a weather-related absence from work.

Get your work ducks in a row...

If working remotely is an option for you, make sure that you have the proper technology and materials needed to do so. (Don't wait to see what the weather actually does to prepare to work from home.) If you are concerned about perceptions about your physical absence from the work site, proactively contact key colleagues and customers to let them know how to reach you and, if appropriate, what you will be working on.

Do contingency planning for child care...

Identify individuals (e.g., relatives, friends, neighbors, babysitters) or child care providers who are able to provide child care on short notice. Talk with your spouse about taking turns staying home from work with your child.

Explore chauffeur services...

If your vehicle is not snow-friendly (i.e., it is light-weight or does not have four-wheel drive), consider if any of your colleagues drive one that is. If they live near you and don't mind driving in the snow, consider asking if you can get a ride with them. Offer to pay gas, tolls, or buy them a coffee or car wash for the effort. If there is a nearby location (e.g., entrance of sub-division, top/bottom of a hill) that is easier to navigate than coming directly to your home, grab your snow boots and plan to meet the person there.



Save for a rainy (or snowy) day...

Make sure you have an emergency fund that you can tap into if you lose income from not being able to work on snowy days.

An ounce of prevention...

Eliminate any stressors that you can. At the beginning of the season, make sure your vehicle is ready for winter weather. (This means having things such as your battery, tires, fluids, etc. checked by a mechanic.) Park your car at the end of your driveway so that you don't have a lot to shovel in order to get on the road. Research some winter driving tips so that you know the things to do to navigate snow-covered roads. Place items such as a shovel or snow brush, sand/kitty litter (for traction), a blanket, etc. in your car in case you need them while on the road. (For more winter driving tips, visit the Federal Emergency Management Agency at [ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov).) Prevent cabin-fever from attacking your children by picking up books and DVDs from the library or gathering materials for craft projects in advance of a possible snow day.

See the silver lining...

Indeed snow days can be unexpected, inconvenient, and annoying. However, if you find yourself with one, why not make the most of this unplanned circumstance? Build a snowman or stay warm in the kitchen by doing some leisurely baking or slow cooking that you normally don't have time to do. Appreciate the gas and mileage that you're saving from one less commuting day or the brief respite you get from a normally overscheduled day. Warm your heart by doing a random act of kindness like shoveling a neighbor's driveway. Give the day to renewal, not resentment.