

How to Survive the Winter Weather Bomb (2018-01-06)

As most of Eastern North America suffers in the deep freeze this January, many families are probably trying to figure out what to do with children when the unusual weather has brought changes to usual routines. Sometimes this can be a really entertaining interlude, when places that don't normally experience snow get a chance to play in the white stuff. Making snowmen and snow angels is always fun. So is sledding with the family dog, apparently—there are a lot of videos on Facebook this week with Rex and Fifi stealing sliders and toboggans or enjoying a ride on a Flying Saucer. But what if it is so snowy/icy/cold/windy that you have school or daycare closures? What if it's too dangerous to send the kids outdoors to play? How many days of forced confinement before we all go a little bonkers from cabin fever?

What to do? Well, kids are little balls of energy and they need to expend that stuff somehow. Maybe it's time to temporarily relax your usual rules about cartwheels in the living room or building forts with the furniture. If you can find a way to do this safely, without braking anything, or kids getting hurt, these are activities that kids will enjoy in the now and remember fondly forever. The winter Olympics are coming soon. Have your children compete to see who can do the most somersaults down the hall. On a carpeted floor, build a family pyramid—and take a selfie without dumping the pyramid. Got a big box left over from Christmas? Let them turn it into an airplane or train or ice cream store. Open it flat and let them draw on the cardboard. Lay down flat on the box and trace each other's silhouettes, then colour them in as pirates or astronauts or princesses. Tape it to the wall and create a mural—or a family tree. Here's a chance to do some real discovery. Older ones can help with online searches.

Baking is a great way to get a group together and active in the kitchen and is really a good thing to do if your house is a little chilly. Let the oven help warm things up. (Don't use a gas oven to warm up a room—see risks below.) If your house is cold, try group sleeping in the warmest room. We did this one year when our furnace went kaput for a week in November. (Hard to find a furnace repairman on Manitoulin Island during hunting season!) We still had power, so we ran a heater in one room and we all stayed there. It made an inconvenience into an adventure, especially when we took turns telling stories at bedtime.

What if you lose power temporarily and don't have access to TV or WiFi? No computers--No problem! Get out the board games or a deck of cards and teach your kids to play Go Fish or Crazy Eights. Read books or dress up and try some drama. Use real make-up or face paint and make that a part of the process. Show your kids how truly menacing their mom can be as a Wicked Witch, how brave their dad is as Shrek. Play with them! Use flashlights and make shadow puppets on the wall.

If you lose power for more than 24 hours, or if your house or apartment become too cold, find your way to a warming shelter, or go to a neighbour, friend, or family member who may have power or access to a proper wood-burning fireplace. Stay away from using candles or making fires indoors without proper venting. Don't use camp stoves or barbecues indoors. This can lead to tragedy due to fires or Carbon monoxide poisoning. We *do* want you to **SURVIVE!**