

The Sick Kid Workday

Triage a packed calendar the morning a kid wakes up sick

When a system goes down at work, nobody tries to run the full roadmap that day. Someone triages: what absolutely has to happen, what gets pushed, who gets told. Then the day gets rebuilt around reality instead of the plan you made yesterday. A sick kid at 6:45 AM is the same kind of outage. The instinct is to try to save the whole day anyway, quietly falling apart by 10 AM. Ten minutes of triage up front saves you the whole mess.

What you need: ten minutes before you touch your laptop, your calendar for today, and your partner or backup if you have one.

The steps

1. **Confirm what you're actually dealing with.** (2 minutes) Fever and cough day, or genuinely can't-be-alone sick? The plan is different for each, so don't skip this.
2. **Sort today's calendar into three piles.** (2 minutes) Must happen as scheduled, can move to async or tomorrow, can be cancelled outright. Be honest, most things survive a day's delay.
3. **Cancel the "can be cancelled" pile first.** (2 minutes) Do this before anything else. It's the fastest win and it buys you calm for the harder decisions.
4. **Send one message to your team, not five apologies.** (1 minute) "Kid's home sick today, I'm around but slower, ping me if it's urgent." One line. No essay about what's wrong with your childcare.
5. **Handoff with your partner or backup, if you have one.** (2 minutes) Who's got mornings, who's got the must-happen meeting, who's on call if things get worse. Say it plainly, don't assume it's obvious.
6. **Pick your one non-negotiable work thing and protect it.** (1 minute) One meeting or task you truly can't move. Build the day's low bar around getting that one thing done.

Today's triage

What kind of sick day is this

Must happen today

Cancelling

Moving to tomorrow

The one message to my team

Who's covering what

When it goes sideways

The kid gets worse mid-morning and the plan you made is now wrong. Fine, replan. Ten minutes of triage was never meant to be a contract, it was meant to get you out of panic mode. Redo the piles.

You feel like you have to prove you're still working. You don't. A clear one-line message bought you the room to actually parent today without narrating every hour of it.

Your partner also has a "can't move" meeting at the same time as yours. Someone's non-negotiable becomes negotiable. Decide together which one, out loud, instead of both quietly hoping the other bends first.

Nobody does a full workday and a full sick day well at the same time. Triage isn't giving up, it's how you get through today without wrecking tomorrow too.