



# **ROAD RAGE**

**OWN THE ROAD  
WITH DEFENSIVE  
DRIVING**

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# INTRODUCTION

The phrase "road rage" entered the English language around 1994 in London. The Oxford English Dictionary first started listing "road rage" in 1997. It defines it as "a violent anger caused by the stress and frustration of driving in heavy traffic."

This illustrates that the issue of road rage and angry drivers is a relatively new phenomenon, but it's an especially scary one as well. Consider the following incidents:

*In Canada a driver of a van was run over by a pickup truck during the truck driver's fit of road rage*

*In London, two drivers came to blows over who was going to use the car wash first at a service station*

*In Atlanta, Georgia a two-year old toddler was shot through the neck by an irate motorist engaged in an argument over a road incident with the toddler's father*

*In Detroit, Michigan a 34 year-old man said he was attacked with a club by another motorist after the two drivers stopped on the road to confront each other*

*Near Cincinnati, Ohio a 29 year-old woman cut in front of a 24 year-old pregnant woman and slammed on her brakes in an irate gesture following her anger about the latter's driving. The mother-to-be lost control of her car in a violent accident in which her unborn child was killed*

*In Florida, a 41 year-old man who pulled into an exact change lane at a toll booth was shot and killed as he exited his truck to confront an irate driver behind him who was annoyed at the 41 year-old's delay in paying the toll*

While these stories may be to the extreme, the fact is that road rage is a very real and menacing threat on today's roads that occurs all the time is a reality. It can be scary to drive a car anymore.

Many times, the incidents that can spark an incidence of road rage are unintentional. That would include a driver who accidentally cuts off another driver, confusion over directions causing a person to drive slower, not paying attention while behind the wheel, etc.

No matter how accidental the cause, the fact remains that there are some people out there operating a motor vehicle who have absolutely no tolerance for mistakes made by other drivers. That lack of tolerance can result in road rage and, as we have shown, can have sometimes deadly results.

Just about everyone has had a brush with road rage. It may have been in busy rush hour traffic or simply when you slowed down in a strange part of town looking for the right street. The driver behind you lets you know how irritated he is with a long, loud blast from his horn and then guns his engine as he passes. You glance out your side window and are greeted by a hostile glare, an obscene gesture or...even worse.

What's the best way to combat road rage? You can't control other people, so is there anything you can do yourself? Of course there is! You can learn defensive driving strategies that can – and will – keep you out of harm's way.

Driving a car is a privilege, but being safe on the roadways is a right. We'll show you how to stay safe and be a defensive driver. When you start putting this information, you can drive with the piece of mind that you need to be secure.

## **WHAT IS ROAD RAGE**

While we did give you a definition above according to the Oxford dictionary, road rage encompasses much more than just what a dictionary can provide. Road rage, also called intermittent explosive disorder, is a term used to refer to violent incidents caused by stress caused by accidents or incidents on roadways. It is often a natural extension of aggressive driving.

Road rage frustration and aggression is not caused by traffic, no matter how heavy. Road rage is a learned cultural habit of retaliation when you feel like retaliating. It's a free choice we exercise. When we

are frustrated in heavy traffic we have a choice of how we're going to respond.

Road rage in its simplest form occurs when a driver reacts angrily to other drivers, cutting them off, tailgating, gesturing or waving a fist. At its worst, the angry driver may become more aggressive and try to kill or injure another driver.

In all actuality, road rage is an expression of an underlying problem with a driver. That driver is not able to remain in control of themselves and their emotions. It isn't the automobile or the other driver that brings out the aggressive nature. It is inside the person who, regardless of the setting fails to control his or her temper and simply explodes.

Road rage can happen to anybody at anytime and can vary from an aggressive gesture or word to a full on physical attack, or in some cases, even murder.

Over the past few years, the so called "road rage" syndrome has developed and we hear an increasing amount about it. However, road rage is nothing new; it has been around us for many a year, probably since the beginning of road transport.

Everybody is capable of showing road rage, yes even YOU! That's why it's so important to learn defensive driving skills along with ways to manage any anger that you might feel while operating a motor vehicle.

On the road behaviors that can trigger incidents of road rage, are many and varied. Some people may just not like the way you look behind the wheel. Some of the most common behaviors however include:

- Tailgating
- Failing to signal
- Holding the middle lane of a two-lane highway
- Cutting in at the head of a line of traffic
- Preventing other vehicles from entering the traffic flow

- Using a mobile phone and not concentrating on the road ahead
- Swooping across lanes to reach an exit
- Stealing a parking space
- A learner driver stalling or driving abnormally slow
- Being overtaken by a motorist exceeding the speed limit who then drives relatively slowly on a single road where 60 mph would be safe
- Any sudden maneuver that causes you to brake or steer
- Ignoring traffic signs or road markings
- Obscene gestures and verbal abuse
- Misuse of the horn and headlamps

What may seem a minor traffic violation to the driver making any of the above mistakes is perceived as aggressive or inconsiderate by others. The incidence of raising tempers and disagreement between drivers seems to become more common place to each generation of drivers as our roads get more congested, fortunately, driver aggression to extent of physical assault is still rare.

Belligerent driving phenomena, commonly associated with young men, is typically a human lifestyle problem as women are becoming increasingly aggressive.

In a major national study done regarding aggressive driving and road rage behavior, the majority of perpetrators are males between the ages of 18 and 26. However, in hundreds of reported cases the perpetrator was 26 to 50 years old, and in 86 known cases the driver was between 50 and 75 years old.

There is no one profile of an "aggressive driver." Most are relatively young, poorly educated males with criminal records, histories of violence, and drug or alcohol problems, and many have recently suffered an emotional or professional setback. However, hundreds of others are successful men and women with no such histories.

While most of the drivers were male, 413 of the recorded incidents, or approximately 4 percent, were female. Women used their

vehicle as a weapon in 285 cases. In 31 known cases, women attacked police officers, usually while the officer was attempting to issue a traffic citation.

The precipitating incidents are often remarkably trivial. Stated reasons for violent traffic disputes include arguments over parking spaces, cutting another motorist off or refusing to allow passing, minor traffic crashes, obscene gestures, loud music, overuse of the horn, slow driving, tailgating, failure to use a turn signal, and similar behaviors. For example, a teenager who murdered a passenger in another vehicle said, "We was dissed."

However, violent traffic disputes are rarely the result of a single incident, but rather are the cumulative result of a series of stressors in the motorist's life. The traffic incident that turns violent is often "the last straw."

The most popular weapons used in traffic altercations are firearms and motor vehicles. In approximately 44 percent of the violent traffic altercations, the perpetrator used a weapon such as a firearm, knife, club, or tire iron. In 23 percent the aggressive driver used the vehicle as a weapon and in 12 percent a vehicle and a standard weapon. More unusual cases include pepper spray, eggs, golf clubs, and in one instance a crossbow.

In at least 94 cases, men and women have directed their automobiles against buildings and other properties. This does not include "crash and rob" incidents motivated by theft.

At least 322 incidents were related to domestic violence, and in 22 cases aggressive drivers have intentionally directed their vehicles into crowds.

In 221 cases motorists intentionally used vehicles to attack law enforcement personnel. Such incidents led to the deaths of at least 48 police officers and 38 drivers and passengers. In other incidents, drivers and passengers were killed when trying to evade police. Nearly all of the 221 incidents involved drivers or passengers who were suspected of some criminal violation.

An average of 38 violent traffic incidents each year is due to racism and interracial tension. Most begin with a small accident, disagreement, or dispute over a parking space. However, hundreds of

incidents that involve people of different races are not caused or aggravated by racism.

In the end, we may very well discover that personal frustration, anger, and testosterone are the most dangerous drugs on the highway.

To illustrate the commonality of road rage, consider the stories in our next section.

## **REAL LIFE ROAD RAGE**

What follows are a few real-life stories involving road rage from people just like you and me. They became victims. While reading these stories, think about what you might do if you were in the same situation.

"A few years ago while I was still living in Miami, I ended up in the "exact change only" lane on the toll road. When I got to the basket I threw in what I thought was the correct change and waited for the gate to go up so I could pass through.

When the gate did not move and I realized that I had no more money with me in the car I had to wait a minute or so for the attendant to walk over to my lane. As I was explaining my situation to him my car starts moving forward. I then realize that the man in the car behind me was PUSHING my car forward with his.

I had to keep my foot planted firmly on the brake to keep my car from hitting the gate. Luckily the attendant put the gate up so I could leave before the idiot behind me decided to come up with a more destructive way to get me out of the way."

"I was in a 'super store' parking lot – there are about 30 different shops and restaurants in this one section, and the parking lot is not too well designed, full of stops and hard turns. I was trying to get out, and I was cut off half way over a stop line.

I looked to the left (traffic coming into the parking lot) and saw this woman driving in, and her head was turned to the left, so if she

did not look, she would have bashed right into me, I had nowhere to go – she also had a couple kids in her car.

I beeped the horn to get her attention, who wants an accident, right? In her overwhelming gratitude, this woman starts YELLING at me, you could see her wild eyes – and of course flips me off wildly. I would have let it go entirely, but in the back seat, you could see her kids mimicking Mom, right down to their middle fingers.”

“I was driving home from the store one evening, and turned down the back lane towards my residence at the end of the block. It's a bit of a blind turn, so it wasn't until I had actually turned that I spotted the car parked IN THE MIDDLE OF THE LANE, leaving no room to maneuver around. I guessed (correctly) that the driver was inside the ice cream shop which is on the corner where I turned from.

I'm not sure what the laws are like elsewhere, but where I live it is illegal to reverse from an alley or lane onto a regular road unless you're reversing from your own personal driveway. Not only is it illegal, but with the ice cream shop being right there, swarms of kids are usually running around and it would be down-right dangerous to do so. So I was stuck with no room to maneuver, until the owner of said parked car returned with her purchase.

About five minutes later, the driver came strolling out of the store with her son, he with an ice cream cone and she holding two banana splits. She sheepishly smiled at me, but made no attempt to hurry as she tried to strap her child in and work out the logistics of getting this ice cream home. I was trying very hard to be patient but was getting tired of this nonsense...but she was at least getting into her car so I would be getting home soon, or so I thought.

She starts the engine and PUTS HER CAR INTO REVERSE, hoping I will reverse and let her out. I was not about to risk running a child over or get a ticket because she couldn't be bothered to take an extra 30 seconds out of her schedule to drive straight ahead and exit the back lane at the other end. I thought for sure she'd see this logic and move forward any minute. Nope.

Instead, she got out of her car and came over to "apologize". She smiled and said she was sorry. I informed her that the back lane is not a parking lot, and there are people who live along the block who

need access to their homes. She smiled again, apologized again, and I guess was standing there in the expectation that I would reverse and let her out the short way.

When I made no move to do so, she started yelling obscenities at me while her child looked on. I refused to budge, telling her that it was illegal and dangerous for me to reverse onto the street, and all she would have to do would be to drive straight and she would easily exit the back lane.

She got into her car and turned off the ignition. Fine, I thought to myself, "Hmmm, it's hot right now, and I'm not the one with 2 banana splits in the car. I wonder how long she'll sit there."

By this time a small crowd of ice cream shop customers had gathered, most of them looking down the road and shaking their heads, wondering why this woman wasn't moving anywhere. It lasted for about 2 minutes, until another vehicle pulled up behind me, also trapped by the blind turn.

She finally turned on the ignition, drove straight and exited the back lane at the other end, giving me the finger as she drove off. Nice example to set for her son!"

"I was driving on the highway in Manitoba, Canada one afternoon. As I slowed to stop for a traffic light, I saw a little yellow sports car, which had been ahead of me, swerve on to the off ramp at the nearby exit. A large pickup truck with a canopy was stopped ahead of him at the end of a line of traffic.

The yellow sports car, which by this time was traveling less than 5 kilometers per hour, rear-ended the truck. It was really just a tap. There wasn't even a scratch on either vehicle.

The driver of the truck, who looked much like an organ-grinder's monkey, jumped out of the cab in a frothy rage and ran over to the driver's window of the sports car. The driver of the sports car started to roll down his window, but the truck driver started shouting the foulest obscenities and questioning his sexual orientation. He punched the partially open window and nearly broke it.

The sports car driver closed the window, but the truck driver punched it three more times. His swearing attracted the attention of other drivers, who pulled their cars over to the shoulder to watch him. When it appeared likely that the truck driver was about to escalate his attack on the sports car, its driver decided to scoot. The truck driver ran back to his truck, and gave chase down one of the major arterial routes to the city core."

The following story comes from a 16 year old boy who had worked hard to make his very first car his pride and joy. He had put hours and hours into the vehicle and was quite proud of what he had accomplished. He thought he knew what he needed to know to drive on the highway. Little did he know, he would be confronted with a situation they never told him about in Driver's Education!

"On mother's day, 1998, my life was completely ripped apart. I had my mom's cell phone and called to let her know I was off work and headed home. It was around 4 p.m. I was driving along enjoying the quiet Sunday afternoon and the thrill of being behind the wheel of my first car.

I was about 3 miles from home when suddenly from out of no where a RED F150 Ford Pick-up, was on my rear bumper. The driver was shaking his fist and blowing his horn. I was on a four lane highway and in the left lane as I was approaching the turn off to come through the tiny East Texas town we live in. I was going between 55 and 60 mph. apparently this was not fast enough for this guy. I looked to my right and gave my signal to move to the right lane.

But, I could not change lanes at this time as another car was in the right lane. At this point, I became very nervous. The driver of the car in the right lane finally backed off so I could proceed to change lanes. At that instant, the driver of the Ford F-150, went around me on my right side and I thought he was going to hit me. He then slowed to my speed and made a obscene jester with his middle finger, then he sped off.

I decided at that point, he was gone and I would go ahead and move to the right lane and proceed home down the highway instead of going through town, as it was about a mile and a-half closer, I just wanted to be home! As I rounded the curve, I noticed the Ford F-150 had slowed down and was in the left lane. This shook me, as my mom

had warned me about crazy drivers on the road. She had told me, people carry guns these days...to always drive carefully and never deliberately cut anyone off. She told me if I did cut someone off accidentally, to wave a friendly, I'm sorry, and move on.

I gripped my steering wheel and looked straight ahead, I knew this guy was angry, and I just wanted to get home. Suddenly, the guy jerked his vehicle in front of mine and hit his brakes. I jerked instinctively to the right and this sent my car out of control and hurling down the embankment. I had no brake control in the tall, slick grass that grows on the side of the road. This man never stopped, he just kept going.

All I could hear were his wheels squealing as he sped off. Then I hit the utility pole. It did not knock me out. With blood all in my face, the first thing I managed to do was call home. After that, I went into shock. I had taken drivers education in public school and I was never taught or told anything about this new killer, "road rage", or how to handle it."

Do these stories sound crazy or contrived to you? Do they seem unbelievable? They did to me, but they are very real. People who are victims of road rage – especially violent road rage – are often permanently scarred and unable to resume driving which can severely impair daily life. That's tough!

In all actuality, traffic deaths have decreased in the years since the automobile started being mass produced. However, it doesn't seem to be enough!

## **HISTORY OF ROAD RAGE**

While the term "road rage" is a relatively new one, the actual phenomenon of road rage is actually decades old. With media coverage, road rage incidents have become better known, but for years, law enforcement has been dealing with this problem.

Driving is the most dangerous activity for the majority of people in an industrialized society. Driving accidents have killed millions of people since 1900 and the number of deaths and injuries increase in

proportion to the number of drivers and the total number of miles driven in an area or region.

Deaths and serious accidents were reduced over the years due to better roads, safer vehicles, more advanced medical technologies, upgraded law enforcement, and economic incentives for people who are safe drivers. However, despite these factors, when viewed over a long term perspective, traffic deaths have still remained relatively constant.

Driving can be a dangerous activity. For instance, in the 1950s the annual fatality rate due to driving accidents was around 50,000 while in the 1990s it has been around 40,000. Yes, there is a reduction, but the curve has quickly leveled off and remains above 40,000 deaths and over 5 million injuries annually in the U.S.

There are several internal factors within drivers that contribute to less safety on the roadways:

- The widespread acceptance of a competitive norm that values getting ahead of other drivers
- The daily round schedule of time pressure and its mismanagement through rushing and disobeying traffic laws
- The weakness of driver education programs so that most drivers have inadequate training in emotional self-control as drivers
- The media portrayal of aggressive driving behaviors in a fun context
- The psychological tendency to maintain a preferred level of risk, so that increased risks are taken when environmental improvements are introduced

Scientists and safety officials attribute this resistance to accident reduction to the attitude and behavior of drivers who tend to respond to safety improvements by driving more dangerously. It has been noted that a critical aspect of driving is the driver's competence in balancing risk with safety.

The risk in driving is largely under the control of the driver. The driver decides at every moment what risks to take and what to inhibit or avoid. Risk taking is a tendency that varies greatly between drivers as well as for the same driver at different times. Thus, if a road is made safer by straightening it, or by moving objects that interfere

with visibility, drivers will compensate for the greater safety by driving faster on it—the so-called "risk homeostasis" phenomenon.

The result is the maintenance of a constant subjective feeling of risk that is the normal habitual threshold for a particular driver. In such a driving environment, the rate of deaths or injuries tends to remain high, despite the safety improvements that are introduced.

The institutional or societal response to this stalemate between safety and risk tolerance has been to increase enforcement activities by monitoring, ticketing, and jailing hundreds of thousands of drivers.

Nevertheless, the number of deaths and injuries has remained nearly steady, year after year. Besides law enforcement, there has been an increase in litigation due to aggressive driving disputes between drivers, as well as more psychotherapy and counseling services, including anger management clinics and workshops, and community initiatives.

Still, these remain scattered attempts, and have been unable to alter basic driving patterns. Socio-cultural methods need to be used to change the driving norms of an entire generation.

That is to say that even though there have always been incidents of angry drivers, the road rage phenomenon has become more common because of mitigating factors. The main factor is the media. An underlying factor is the fact that in this day and age, we are all under considerably more stress than we have ever been.

Twenty-first century Earth is a stressful place. Daily living puts pressure on us that we don't like and don't want, but it's still there. When that stress builds up, it can explode in different ways. Behind the wheel of a car is the very worst place for it to happen.

People often look for different ways to cope with their stress. That includes drugs and alcohol. Drunken driving arrests are at an all-time high. This places everyone at risk. Intoxicated people tend to be more violent thus increasing the road rage trigger even more.

Let's take a little test to see if you are prone to road rage.

## **ROAD RAGER PROFILE**

This "test" isn't meant to be a definitive tool. It is simply a way for you to measure whether or not you have a propensity for acting out against another driver or whether or not you are an aggressive driver. Rate your answers to the following questions on a scale of 1 through 5 with 1 being never doing it and 5 being always.

1. I tailgate another driver to make them go faster.
2. I flash my lights to get another driver to change lanes.
3. I use obscene gestures towards other people.
4. I signal my lane changes.
5. I use my horn to express my irritation with other drivers.
6. I often change lanes from the left to the right to get past slower traffic.
7. If someone cuts me off, I will attempt to "get" that driver back.
8. I drive the speed of traffic as long as it is moving sufficiently fast.
9. I try not to make eye contact with angry driver.
10. I react quickly when the light turns green.
11. I use my cell phone while driving.
12. I try to be a polite and courteous driver.
13. I stay in the right lane except to pass.
14. I drive the speed of traffic.
15. I don't exceed the speed limit.
16. I get into confrontations with other drivers.
17. I follow all motor vehicle laws.
18. I feel that other drivers are complete idiots.

19. When I have a conflict with another driver, I feel I am not at fault.
20. I feel angry when another motorist does something stupid.
21. I think it's a good habit to drive to the speed of traffic.
22. I think that most accidents are caused by drivers less experienced than me.
23. I try to avoid behaviors that might irritate or antagonize others.
24. If someone lets me into their lane, I will acknowledge their kindness with a wave or a friendly gesture.
25. I will avoid driving in another person's blind spot.
26. I think that most drivers who pass me are going way too fast.
27. Slow drivers don't bother me, I'll just pass them.
28. I think that I'm the best driver on the road.
29. I only pass people who are going significantly slower than I am.
30. If I see someone "flipping me off", I return the gesture.

150 – 100 You are a potentially aggressive driver and prone to road rage

99 – 70 You could be prone to road rage, but only if the infraction by the other driver is extreme.

69 – 40 You are a calm driver who obeys the traffic laws and very rarely gets upset with other drivers.

39 – 30 You are a safe, courteous driver who is able to keep control of your emotions while behind the wheel.

We feel that we need to make a distinction between road rage and aggressive driving.

## **ROAD RAGE OR AGGRESSIVE DRIVING**

There is a fine line between these two labels for driving behavior. Aggressive driving leads to road rage either on the part of the driver or on the part of the victim. People who are aggressive driver feel they "own the road". They have little to no regard for other drivers and are reckless and dangerous.

These drivers have a lot of anger, resentment, and frustration and they take that with them when they get behind the wheel of a vehicle. Generally, aggressive drivers are those who are poorly educated with a high level of stress and little ability to cope with that stress.

Some behaviors they may exhibit include:

- Speeding
- Cutting other drivers off
- Making unsafe lane changes
- Following too closely
- Running red lights or stop signs
- Disobeying traffic laws
- Weaving in and out of traffic
- Excessive use of their horn
- Flashing their lights
- Making rude gestures
- Shouting verbal threats

Road rage is what results from an aggressive driver's driving habits. They generally have a short fuse and if you try to stop them from their unsafe behaviors, they become agitated and often violent.

What's even more surprising, possibly to you, is that the aggressive driver often isn't the main person involved in a road rage incident. Road rages results from aggressive driving in one of two ways:

1. The aggressive driver is exhibiting unsafe behavior and another driver attempts to stop that behavior. The aggressive driver becomes angry that someone would stand up to him or her and that anger comes out with un-precipitated rage.
2. The aggressive driver is exhibiting unsafe behavior and another driver becomes angered at the recklessness. He or she confronts the aggressive driver in a threatening way thus precipitating a road rage incident.

Aggressive driving is a choice just as road rage is a choice. Studies have found that it's a learned behavior as well. More than 300 cases of road rage annually have ended with serious injuries or even fatalities -- 1200 incidents per year according to the AAA Foundation study (see References), and rising yearly throughout the six years of the study that examined police records nationally

Most drivers have feelings of road rage because it is a cultural norm. People learn this behavior from childhood when being driven by parents and adults. Also, by the time adolescents begin to drive they have been exposed to thousands of hours of TV programs that feature drivers behaving badly or dangerously and getting away with it.

Legally there is a difference between "road rage" and "aggressive driving". Only a few states have enacted special aggressive driving laws. Road rage cases -- about 1200 a year -- are normally processed as assault and battery (with or without a vehicle), or "vehicular homicide."

Perhaps the biggest cause of unsafe highways is people's unwillingness to scrutinize their own conduct, preferring to blame other drivers. Surveys consistently show that most people have an inflated self-image of their motoring ability, rating the safety of their own driving as much better than the average motorist's.

For instance, two out of three drivers (67 percent) rate themselves almost perfect in excellence as a driver (9 or 10 on a 10-point scale), while the rest consider themselves above average (6 to 8). Surveys typically show that 70 percent of drivers report being a victim of an aggressive driver, while only 30 percent admit to being aggressive drivers.

This suggests that most drivers overlook their own faults and overestimate their competence. One way to examine this hypothesis is to compare the aggressiveness of the two-thirds majority of drivers who rate themselves as near perfect with the one-third minority that see themselves "above average, but with some room to improve."

The difference is dramatic! The drivers, who considered themselves near perfect in excellence with no room for improvement, also confess to significantly more aggressiveness than drivers who see themselves still improving.

This reveals the lack of objectivity in self-assessment shown by two out of three drivers. Despite their self-confessed aggressiveness, they still insist on thinking of themselves as near perfect drivers with almost no room to improve. This egocentric phenomenon can be seen in specific forms of aggressive behaviors.

For example, those who see themselves as near perfect drivers, admit to twice as much chasing of other cars compared to those who see themselves as less perfect. The difference: 15 percent vs. 8 percent is statistically significant. The fact is clear: part of being an aggressive driver is to deny that you need to improve. This is what I call resistance to change.

Many of us have stress in our lives. For some people, stress can be overwhelming. Often, driving in itself becomes a stressful event. Why?

## **HOW DRIVING IS STRESSFUL**

Driving in traffic routinely involves events and incidents. Events are normal sequential maneuvers such as stopping for the light, changing lanes, or putting on the brakes. Incidents are frequent but unpredictable events. Some of these are dangerous and frightening,

like near-misses, while others are merely annoying or depressing, like missing your turn or being insulted by a motorist.

Driving events and incidents are sources of psychological forces capable of producing powerful feelings and irrational thought sequences. Driving is a highly dramatic activity that millions of people perform on a routine daily basis. The drama stems from high risk and unpredictability.

Driving has two conflicting structural components--predictability and unpredictability. Both are present all of the time. Predictability, like maintaining steady speed in one's lane, creates safety, security, and escape from disaster. Unpredictability, like impulsive lane changes without signaling, creates danger, stress, and crashes.

For many people driving is linked to the value of freedom of locomotion. On the one hand they get into cars and drive off where they please the very symbol of freedom and independence. But on the other hand, as they are ready to take off into the open, they encounter restrictions and constrictions, preventing them from driving as they wish due to regulations and congestion.

Here are some of the more common stressors that can cause problems while driving.

1. Immobility: Most of the body during driving remains still and passive, not like walking where the entire body exerts effort and remains continuously active. Tension tends to build up when the body is physically restricted and constricted.
2. Constriction: Motor vehicles are restricted to narrow bands of highway and street lanes. In congested traffic, one's progress is inevitably going to be continuously blocked by numerous other cars.

Being thwarted from going forward when you expect to, arouses the emotion of restriction and constriction, and along with it, anxiety and the desire to escape from the constriction. This anxiety and avoidance prompts drivers to perform risky or aggressive maneuvers that get them and others into trouble.

3. Regulation: Driving is a regulated activity, which means that government agencies and law enforcement officers get to tell

drivers how fast to drive where, and how. Cars and trucks have powerful engines capable of going faster than what is allowed--ever.

Drivers are punished for violating these regulations which they are responsible for knowing and obeying. This imposition, though lawful and necessary, arouses a rebellious streak in many people, which then allows them to regularly disregard whatever regulations seem wrong to them at the time or in the mood they are in.

4. Lack of control: Traffic follows the laws that govern flow patterns like rivers, pipes, blood vessels, and streaming molecules. In congested traffic, the flow depends on the available spaces around the cars, as can be ascertained from an aerial view such as a traffic helicopter, or from a bridge above the highway.

When one car slows down, hundreds of other cars behind run out of space and must tap their brakes to slow down or stop altogether, as in gridlock. No matter how one drives, it's not possible to beat the traffic waves, whose cause or origin starts miles from where you are.

This lack of control over what happens is frustrating, stress producing, and tends to lead to venting one's anger on whoever is around--another driver, a passenger, a pedestrian, a construction worker, the government.

5. Being put in danger: Cars are loved by their owners and they are expensive to fix. Even a scratch is stress producing because it reduces the car's value and is expensive to repair.

Congested traffic filled with impatient and aggressive drivers creates many hair raising close calls and hostile incidents within a few minutes of each other. Physiological stress is thus produced, along with many negative emotions--fear, resentment, rage, helplessness, bad mood, and depression.

6. Territoriality: The symbolic portrayal of the car has tied it to individual freedom and self-esteem, promoting a mental attitude of defensiveness and territoriality. Motorists consider the space inside the car as their castle and the space around the car as their territory.

The result is that they repeatedly feel insulted or invaded while they drive, lulling them into a hostile mental state, even to warlike postures and aggressive reactions to routine incidents that are suddenly perceived as skirmishes, battles, or duels between drivers. For many motorists, driving has become a dreaded daily drudge, an emotional roller coaster difficult to contain and a source of danger and stress.

7. Diversity: There are about 200 million licensed drivers in North America today, and they represent a diversity of drivers who vary in experience, knowledge, ability, style, and purpose for being on the road. These social differences reduce our sense of predictability because drivers with different ability and purpose don't behave according to the expected norms.

The peace and confidence of motorists is shaken by events that are unexpected, and driving becomes more complex, more emotionally challenging. Diversity or plurality increases stress because it creates more unpredictability.

8. Multi-tasking: The increase in dashboard complexity and in-car activities like eating, talking on the phone, checking voice e-mail, challenge people's ability to remain alert and focused behind the wheel. Drivers become more irritated at each other when their attention or alertness seems to be lacking due to multi-tasking behind the wheel. Multi-tasking without adequate training increases stress by dividing attention and reducing alertness.
9. Denying our mistakes: Driving is typically done by automatic habits compiled over years, and this means that much of it is outside people's conscious awareness. Typically drivers tend to exaggerate their own "excellence," overlooking their many mistakes.

When passengers complain or, when other drivers are endangered by these mistakes, there is a strong tendency to deny the mistakes and to see complaints as unwarranted. This denial allows drivers to feel self-righteous and indignant at others, enough to want to punish and retaliate, adding to the general hostility and stress level on highways.

10. Cynicism: Many people have learned to drive under the supervision of parents and teachers who are critical and judgmental. We don't just learn to manipulate the vehicle; we also acquire an over-critical mental attitude towards it.

As children we're exposed to this constant judgmental behavior of our parents who drive us around. It's also reinforced in movies portraying drivers behaving badly. This culture of mutual cynicism among motorists promotes an active and negative emotional life behind the wheel. Negative emotions are stress producing.

11. Loss of objectivity: Driving incidents are not neutral: there is always someone who is considered to be at fault. There is a natural tendency to want to attribute fault to others rather than to self.

This self-serving bias even influences the memory of what happened, slanting the guilt away from self and laying it on others. Drivers lose objectivity and right judgment when a dispute comes up. Subjectivity increases stress by strengthening the feeling that one has been wronged.

12. Venting: Part of our cultural heritage is the ability to vent anger by reciting all the details of another individual's objectionable behavior. The nature of venting is such that it increases by its own logic until it breaks out into overt hostility and even physical violence. It requires motivation and self-training to bring venting under control before it explodes into the open.

Until it's brought under conscious control, venting is felt as an energizing "rush" and promotes aggressiveness and violence. Nevertheless, this seductive feeling is short-lived and is accompanied by a stream of anger-producing thoughts that impair our judgment and tempt us into rash and dangerous actions.

Repeated venting takes its toll on the immune system and acts as physiological stress with injurious effects on the cardiovascular system.

13. Unpredictability: The street and highway create an environment of drama, danger, and uncertainty. In addition

heat, noise and smells act as physiological stress and aggravate feelings of frustration and resentment. Competition, hostility, and rushing further intensify the negative emotions. The driving environment has become tedious, brutish, and dangerous, difficult to adjust to on the emotional plane.

14. Ambiguity: Motorists don't have an accepted or official gesture communication language. There is no easy way of saying "Oops, I'm sorry!" as we do in a bank line. This allows for ambiguity to arise: "Did he just flip me off or was that an apology?"

It would no doubt help if vehicles were equipped with an electronic display allowing drivers to flash pre-recorded messages. Lack of clear communication between motorists creates ambiguity, which contributes to stress.

15. Under-trained in emotional intelligence: Traditionally, driver education was conceived as acquainting students with some general principles of safety, followed by a few hours of supervised hands-on experience behind the wheel, or on a driving simulator. Developing sound judgment and emotional self-control were not part of the training, even though these goals were mentioned as essential.

Most drivers today are untrained or under-trained, in cognitive and affective skills. Cognitive skills are good habits of thinking and judgment. Affective skills are good habits of attitude and motivation. Drivers thus lack the necessary coping abilities such as how to cool off when angered or frustrated, or how to cooperate with the traffic flow and not hinder it. This lack of training in emotional intelligence creates high stress conditions for most drivers.

It is common to relate aggressiveness to social and environmental factors, in addition to individual personality factors. For instance, congestion on highways and anonymity in cars interact with faulty attitudes and inadequate coping skills to produce aggressive traffic behavior under certain identifiable critical conditions.

These apparent triggering conditions are accidental because they are unpredictable, and involve symbolic meaning for the dignity or self-worth of the interactions who may later report having felt insulted or threatened. It is part of popular psychology to call these

provocative and dramatic conditions "triggers" as in, "It's not my fault. He provoked me. It's his fault. He made me do it."

The trigger theory of anger serves to absolve the perpetrator from some or all of the responsibility for the aggression or violence. Here the attackers see themselves as the victims through a self-serving speech act by which they escape culpability and blame. It is common for people with road rage to show no remorse for their assault and battery, seeing what they did as justified and deserved.

Doctors have been studying the psychology of driving and road rage for years.

## **THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DRIVING**

Driving psychology refers to the knowledge drivers need to cumulate throughout their career as driver--between six and seven decades for most people in North America. This knowledge is thus focused on self-instructional methods. This means taking responsibility for our own actions.

Driving psychology is the study of the social-psychological forces that act upon drivers in traffic. Situations are analyzed through external as well as internal methods of data gathering.

For example, in one study the aggressiveness of drivers was measured in terms of observed rate of speed reduction, or the making of some hostile gesture at pedestrians in a marked crosswalk. It was found that aggressiveness of both men and women drivers were higher against men pedestrians than women pedestrians.

This is an instance of the external analysis of driver behavior. In another study, drivers spoke their thoughts out loud into a tape recorder giving their perceptions and reactions to traffic events and incidents.

It was found that the average trip from home and work is filled with many incidents that arouse feelings of hostility and thoughts of mental violence. This is an instance of the driver's internal behavior.

An approach that involves both internal and external analyses consists of interviewing drivers about their driving, either "in depth" or

on a questionnaire, and relating it to their self-witnessing records. One may also have observers independently make observations of drivers who are making self-witnessing tapes, which also allows the correlation or concurrence of external and internal data.

Driving psychology is a behavioral engineering tool. Research in driving psychology uses the self-witnessing approach, which is a method of generating objective data on oneself as a driver.

The driver operates in three separate but interacting behavioral areas known as affective, cognitive, and sensorimotor. In other words, it takes the motive of a goal destination (affective domain) to keep the car moving, as well as a variety of related motives (affective) such as the desire (affective) to avoid a collision or the emotion of anger (affective) at another driver.

Besides this, it takes knowledge (cognitive domain) of vehicle operation and traffic regulations to get through, besides making judgments (cognitive) about what other motorists are likely to do or not to do.

And finally, it also takes the coordinated execution or performance (sensorimotor domain) of movements in appropriate response to the motive and the judgment. These three behavioral domains jointly and interactively constitute driving or traffic behavior.

Personality and character are related to a driver's style of coping with traffic stress. Acts, thoughts, and feelings in driving interact in an integrated system. A driving trip typically involves the presence of a dominant motive such as the feeling of being in a rush, or the desire to outplay other drivers by getting ahead of them.

The dominant motive (affective domain) is a character tendency that expresses itself in other settings as well. For example, a person may experience hostile thoughts (cognitive behavior) towards others wherever competition is at work, whether a bank line, a restaurant, or switching traffic lanes (sensorimotor domain).

Data on the private world of drivers show that frustration begets anger, which leads to feelings of hostility that are elaborated in mental violence and ridicule, and finally acted out in aggressive behavior. It is evident that the aggressive behavior is an outward consequence of an inner interplay between the negative feeling and its conscious justification or condoning. This threefold aspect of driving behavior is

at the center of driving psychology.

The topics of driving psychology often overlap with traffic psychology or applied psychology, but the method of generating the data is distinctive. One example is the study of risk taking in driving.

Few traffic situations are without risk. Drivers are constantly involved with this risk. Incidents occur all the time and the threat involved is experienced as stress. Reduction of traffic stress is a major concern for both driving psychology and applied traffic psychology.

In the old paradigm methods include extending traffic safety education to children, providing driver education for adolescents, and continuing driver education for adults through courses, legislation, and public media campaigns. Driving psychology adds a new major component to these methods, namely the idea that driver training is lifelong self-training, and that it involves training our emotional habits in traffic, our thinking habits behind the wheel, and our style or overt actions for which we are legally and socially responsible.

The basic principles of driving psychology include:

1. Driving is a complex of behaviors acting together as cultural norms.
2. Driving norms exist in three domains: affective, cognitive, and sensorimotor.
3. Driving norms are transmitted by parents, other adults, books, movies, TV.
4. The primary affective driving norms for this generation are:
  - valuing territoriality, dominance, and competition as a desirable driving style
  - condoning intolerance of diversity (in needs and competencies of other drivers)
  - supporting retribution ethics (or vigilante motives with desire to punish or amend)

- social acceptance of impulsivity and risk taking in driving
- condoning aggressiveness, disrespect, and the expression of hostility

These affective norms are negative and anti-social. Socio-cultural methods must be used to reduce the attractiveness of these aggressive norms and to increase the attractiveness of positive and cooperative driver roles.

5. The primary cognitive driving norms are:

- inaccurate risk assessment
- biased and self-serving explanations of driving incidents
- lack of emotional intelligence as a driver
- low or underdeveloped level of moral involvement (dissociation and egotism)

These cognitive norms are inaccurate and inadequate. Self-training and self-improvement techniques must be taught so that drivers can better manage risk and regulate their own emotional behavior.

6. The primary sensorimotor driving norms are:

- automatized habits (un-self-conscious or unaware of one's style and risk)
- errors of perception (e.g., distance, speed, initiating wrong action)
- lapses (in one's attention or performance due to fatigue, sleepiness, drugs, boredom, inadequate training or preparation)

These sensorimotor norms are inadequate and immature. Lifelong driver self-improvement exercises are necessary to reach more competent habits of driving.

7. Driving norms and behavior can be changed by socio-cultural management techniques that create in the driver a desire for

change, by weakening negative norms and strengthening positive norms of driving.

Since driving is a habit in three domains of behavior, driving self-improvement is possible and effective in improving this habit. Specific elements in each domain must be addressed in recognition of the fact that driving consists of thousands of individual habits or skills, each of which can be identified, tested, and improved, on a long term basis.

8. Drivers maintain strong resistance to externally imposed restrictions and regulations so that these methods alone are not sufficient to create real changes in driver behavior. Driving Psychology uses socio-cultural methods that act as change agents.

Group dynamic forces are powerful influencing agents that can overcome drivers' resistance to change. This is achieved by group activities that focus on this resistance in an explicit way, and afterwards, are put into conscious practice through follow up self-witnessing activities behind the wheel. These informal groups are called QDCs (Quality Driving Circles) and their function is to exert a long term or permanent socio-moral influence on the driving quality of its members.

This positive influence is exerted by members on each other when they adhere to a Standard QDC Curriculum, as approved by designated safety officials or agencies on a regional or national basis. The QDC Curriculum is created through the principles of driving psychology.

9. Driving is a semi-conscious activity since much of it depends on automatic habits acquired through culture and experience over several years. Thus, the driver's self-assessment is not objective or accurate, until trained in objective self-assessment procedures.
10. Driving inherently involves taking risks, making errors, and losing emotional self-control. Thus, drivers need to be trained in risk taking, error recovery, and emotional control under emergency or provocation conditions.
11. Obtaining a driver's license cannot be considered the end of driver training. Continued driver training in the form of guided

lifelong self-improvement activities is essential for acquiring new skills. These new skills are needed as driving gets more complex with technology such as managing car audio devices , reading maps on screens , using computers , note taking , talking on phone or radio , keeping to a schedule , eating, etc.

The Standard QDC Curriculum (Quality Driving Circles) needs to be kept up-dated continuously and the latest additions are to be made available to all functioning QDCs in a region. These up-dates are to focus on new developments that technology brings to vehicles and roads, all of which require the acquisition of new skills by drivers.

The concepts and methods of driving psychology have to be clear to the drivers or trainees involved. Driving psychology maintains an internal rhetoric of persuasion designed to empower drivers to overcome their spontaneous inner resistance to its principles.

It is to be expected that drivers will experience feelings of resistance to the principles of driving psychology. A major reason is that driving psychology involves self-assessment and self-modification, both of which are painful to most people. There is a natural and predictable resistance to changing automatic habits that have been ingrained in the sensorimotor domain.

There is resistance to changing cognitive norms of evaluating and judging other drivers. There is resistance to giving up affective norms of hostility and self-assertiveness as a driver. Driving psychology predicts the forms of the internal resistance and provides drivers with socio-cultural methods they can use for overcoming their own internal resistance to change.

Alright, so now we've looked at what aggressive driving and road rage is, now we have to deal with ways to get rid of these behaviors. That involves two aspects. First is your reaction to an aggressive driver. Then you need how NOT to be an aggressive driver yourself.

## **STOP AGGRESSIVE DRIVING**

If you are an aggressive driver, the responsibility for overcoming your dangerous ways lies inside of you. You are a risk to yourself and to other drivers, and unless you have a real death wish, it's time to

take back your emotions when you are behind the wheel to protect yourself and others.

This requires a change of mindset when you are behind the wheel of the car. Because aggressive driving is generally caused by stress, you need to first acknowledge that you have that stress and then take steps to reduce that stress – especially behind the wheel of a car.

Many people get stressed while driving because they are late getting to their destination. This remedy is easy. Just allow yourself more travel time. If you have to be at work at 8:00 and you have a 30 minute commute, don't leave at 7:30 – leave at 7:00. When you have that extra half hour cushion, you won't be in such a hurry to get where you are going.

Forget winning - Allow more time for trips so you don't become angered if something happens to slow you down.

Put yourself in the other driver's shoes. Someone speeding may be a volunteer fireman or a physician rushing to a hospital.

Make yourself become committed to obeying all traffic signs and regulations. Keep track of your speed and always make a full stop at all stop signs. Wait for "the dip" that the car makes once completely stopped before taking your foot off the brake.

Remind yourself regularly to drive as if you're being videotaped on a live TV show with the camera and mike right in your car. Make no cussing, no yelling, no threatening gestures. All of that would be too embarrassing on the national network. So stay well- behaved.

Keep alive the conviction that driver errors be considered from a moral and spiritual point of view. Is breaking the speed limit immoral? Isn't it a sin to injure someone as a result of your impatience? Is threatening a pedestrian with your car an evil act? Isn't drunk driving a crime against humanity?

Use self-regulatory sentences to defuse and de-dramatize driver exchanges in traffic. If you hear yourself denigrate someone ("Stupid driver! Why don't you watch it."), immediately use counter-propaganda sentences such as, "Come on, be nice. Give the man a break."

Or if you think that someone is tailgating you and out to get you, tell yourself, "Take it easy. He probably isn't even aware he's following too close" or, "He's probably in a hurry. Maybe I can pull over to let him pass."

Keep yourself knowledgeable on the subject of driving. The public and university libraries have a tremendous amount of books and magazines on driver behavior, accident statistics, traffic safety education, and so on. You can become impressed and affected by this information. It may force you to re-appraise the situation and your contributory role in it.

Be completely aware of your emotional reactions and then take some serious steps to stop acting the way you are. Think about the consequences of your behavior before you act. You could be endangering your own life as well as those you love not to mention other drivers on the road with you.

- When you merge, make sure you have plenty of room. Always use your turn signal to show your intentions before making a move. If someone cuts you off, slow down and give them room to merge into your lane.
- If you are in the right lane and someone wants to pass, move over and let them by. You may be "in the left" because you are traveling at the speed limit - but you may also be putting yourself in danger by making drivers behind you angry.
- Allow at least a two-second space between your car and the car ahead. Drivers may get angry when they are followed too closely. If you feel you are being followed too closely, signal and pull over when safe to do so, allowing the other driver to pass.
- Use your horn rarely, if ever.
- Keep your hands on the wheel and avoid making any gestures that might anger another driver. That includes "harmless" expressions of irritation like shaking your head.
- If another driver is acting angry, don't make eye contact.
- Give angry drivers lots of room. If another driver tries to pick a fight, put as much distance between you as possible. And, remember "it takes two to tango". One angry driver can't start a fight unless another driver is willing to join in.

## **AVOIDING ROAD RAGE**

As we have stated throughout this book, road rage is a very dangerous situation that can result in physical attack and in the most extreme situations – even serious bodily harm, possibly death. It's easy to get mad at rude drivers, but it's up to you to stop the violence before it even starts.

It should be noted that you will not always be able to diffuse a potentially volatile situation. Some drivers are going to be aggressive no matter what you do. But if you really try to keep yourself in check when confronted with violent driving, you will be making the first step toward stopping that violence.

First and foremost, don't take aggressive driving personally. In general, the other driver isn't "out to get you". Some people are just bad drivers or their mistakes are unintentional. They may be tired or just not paying attention. Give them the benefit of the doubt, let go of those bad feelings, and get on with your day.

Remember to breathe and work through your anger with relaxation. The next time you want to inform a fellow commuter of how he or she drives, take a few deep breaths. The process of breathing deeply can help keep you centered and control stress levels.

Don't offend when behind the wheel. This means obeying traffic laws and taking steps to be sure you don't cut off another driver, drive slowly in the left lane, tailgating, and making rude or offensive gestures. Sure the temptation might be too great to resist, but you'll be a better and safer driver when you just drive smart and avoid problems.

If you find yourself confronted with an angry fellow driver, don't engage them. It takes more than one person to make a fight. If you refuse to become angry with another driver, there won't be any fight.

Steer clear and give that other driver plenty of room. If necessary, pull off the road and let them get a safe distance ahead of you.

Avoid eye contact with them, and by all means, get help if you find yourself threatened. Some states and cellular companies have special phone numbers that you can call if you find yourself in a dangerous situation.

Stay calm while behind the wheel. When someone cuts you off by mistake, think of the last time you did the exact same thing to someone else. Nobody is perfect --including you. So just calm down and try to be civilized. Take two deep breaths, pass him and let him know that he's made a mistake. Such a simple gesture will definitely make the guy that cut you off think twice in the future, including checking all angles and blind-spots before changing lanes.

Stay alert while you're driving. Road rage is often derived from a blatant driving mistake. A simple thing like flicking your signal lights every time you turn or change lanes can help you avoid road rage from flaring.

Being alert also means keeping your eyes open for other drivers, and staying away from crazy motorists instead of irritating them even more.

Assume that the other drivers on the road are going to make mistakes. When you react calmly and make sure that you are on the lookout for mistakes by other people, you'll be able to avoid potentially volatile situations and keep yourself out of accidents.

Maintaining an ample distance between your car and the one in front of you is also a way to steer clear of potential road rage. We all know how it feels to have someone practically glued to your bumper. Tailgating is a very common cause of accidents and it can be avoided by simply moving to the right lane and letting the faster driver pass.

- When in town, especially at night, make sure all car doors are locked, and keep the windows and sun roof only partly open.
- Secure any and all valuables (i.e. portable computers, mobile phones, brief cases, handbags, etc.) and keep them well out of sight.
- Avoid conflict on the road - gestures, stares, unnecessary use of the horn, flashing lights on, that might incite anger in another driver.
- Use lane sense and your indicators correctly.

- Don't get out of your car if you are being rammed or are blocked in.
- Be aware of other road users and their intentions.
- Keep your distance, and when stopped at a traffic light, give yourself room to drive away, just in case.
- If you are being followed, drive to a police station or a crowded public place for help.
- Avoid tailgating other cars on the road; it is dangerous and threatening.
- If an attacker tries to enter your car, sound your horn or alarm.
- If approached, don't argue. Apologize profusely if necessary, even if in the right. You can always take down details and report the offender.
- Above all, prevention is better than cure. Be courteous at all times to other road users - don't expect courtesy if you show none.

Human beings, like animals are territorial. The car's safety space or cushion is an extension of personal territory, so when other vehicles get close we sense that our personal space is being threatened and our driving style can change depending what happens in this space. Compare your driving manners when traveling on business through a busy town, or an overcrowded motorway with when you're on holiday motoring through a quiet village out in the country.

All through our lives we calculate risk against advantage in one way or another. Similarly, when we're driving, the ease of a car's handling and implicit belief that its design will protect us, can encourage us into taking deliberate risks.

- Never retaliate against acts of bad driving, they could be unintentional mistakes. Rest assured that if you feel that another driver is a dangerous idiot, and then everybody else does too!
- Where another driver is continuously hassling you, avoid over-reacting by accelerating, braking or swerving suddenly and try to

avoid eye contact. Drive to a busy place or the nearest police station to get help.

- When stopped in traffic, keep an escape route that is enough distance to be able to move out from behind the vehicle in front. Can you see the rear tires of the car in front and some of the road?
- Where someone attempts to enter your car, sound your horn repeatedly to attract attention.
- Driving where traffic is moving slowly, as in towns, lock your doors and keep the windows and sunroof only partially open.
- Don't even think about carrying any type of weapon. It might provoke a potential assailant who could well grab it and use it against you.

Where bad driving causes you to take avoiding action to prevent a crash or near miss, letting your anger lead to confrontation will achieve little. We cannot do much about the way other drivers use the road, but we can do something about our own driving to make it enjoyable, safer and less stressful.

- Keep your distance
- Do not pass unless you have to
- Change lanes once it is safe. Don't jump lanes without looking.
- If you cannot change lanes and an aggressive driver is behind you, stay where you are, maintain the proper speed and do not respond with hostile gestures.
- Call one of the State Police Hotlines:
  - You may call 911 (or from a cellular phone **\*911**)
  - If you believe a driver may be impaired, you may call 1-800-CURB-DWI (**1-800-287-2394**) or from a cellular phone **\*DWI (\*394)**

If you witness an act of aggressive driving, the police cannot issue a ticket simply because you've gotten a plate number. A police officer must witness the infraction and positively identify the driver of the vehicle in order to issue a ticket. However, if you travel a route on a regular basis and witness aggressive behavior at certain times, or all of the time, the State Police would be interested in knowing about the locations.

Use common courtesy:

- Lane blocking -- Don't block the passing lane on multiple lane highways. Allow vehicles to pass you.
- Tailgating -- Maintain a safe distance between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you.
- Signal use -- Don't change lanes without using your signal, and make sure you can change lanes without cutting another driver off. After changing lanes or turning, turn your signal off.
- Horn use -- Use your horn sparingly. Noise is shown to be a contributor to stress.
- Failure to turn -- In many areas, including New York State, right turns are allowed after a complete stop for a red light unless an intersection is marked otherwise. Avoid the right lane if you are not turning right.
- Parking:
  - Don't take up more than one parking space
  - Don't park in a space reserved for people with disabilities unless you are disabled
  - Don't open your door into the car next to you
  - When parallel parking, do not tap the vehicles in front or in back of yours
  - Always look carefully before backing out of a parking space
- Headlight use -- Keep headlights on low beam, except where lighting conditions are poor. Dim your high beams for oncoming traffic, when approaching a vehicle from the rear or when another vehicle is passing you.

- Merging -- When traffic permits, move out of the right hand acceleration lane of a freeway to allow vehicles easier access from on-ramps.
- Blocking traffic -- If you are driving a cumbersome or slow moving vehicle, pull over when possible to allow traffic to pass you. Do not block the road to stop and have a conversation with another driver or a pedestrian.
- Alarms -- Be sure you know how to turn off the anti-theft alarm on any vehicle you are driving. If you are purchasing an alarm, buy one that turns off automatically after a short time.
- Improve the comfort of your vehicle.

Listen to music that reduces your anxiety, or try listening to books on tape, but avoid anger-inducing talk radio. Use your air conditioner. Make your seat more comfortable by adjusting your seating position or using a pillow. Concentrate on being relaxed.

Take a deep breath. Don't clench your teeth or grip the steering wheel too tightly. Try doing limited stretching exercises. Don't drive when you are upset, angry or overtired.

Take a break to calm down, "cool off" or rest before you get behind the wheel. Self-control is crucial in managing stress and aggression.

It is important for individuals to have a set of responses to cope with frustration. The most important advice is to remain patient in traffic congestion. You can gain a sense of control by realizing that people behave differently in different situations and that environmental factors may affect others to a greater or lesser degree than they affect you. Information about why a driver may be acting in a certain way will make their behavior more predictable to you, and you will be able to take action to avoid a confrontation, if necessary.

Drivers must pay more attention to their own levels of emotion. Evidence suggests that drivers who allow their emotions to spiral out of control while driving are a much greater risk to themselves than to those around them. It is important not to try to alleviate aggressive emotion with an outburst. Research shows that this does not help to overcome the situation, and the risk of retaliation increases.

Several psychologists suggest a "cooling off" period such as going for a walk or using relaxation techniques. Although many people, particularly men, go for a drive to "cool off", it is not recommended. Any activity that is an attempt to "cool off" must be distracting enough to interfere with the train of anger-inducing thought.

Avoid all conflict if possible. If you are challenged, take a deep breath and get out of the way, even if you are in the right.

It's a good idea to start practicing self-witnessing or taking stock of how you are feeling about a particular incident.

## **POSITIVE SELF TALK**

When you are behind the wheel of a vehicle, you can't control other drivers, but you can control your reactions to them. A good way to do this is to start practicing self talk that will diffuse your feelings about the situation.

Our next section will address emotional intelligence and ways to correct your thinking, but with positive self talk, you will first acknowledge the extreme reactions you may have to a bad driver and begin to change your thinking about them.

You first need to understand what happens to your body through its extreme reactions. Let's say that a driver cuts you off. What happens to your body? Many drivers report the following reactions:

### Physiological Reactions

- heart pounding
- momentary stopping of breathing
- muscle spasms
- stomach cramps
- wet hands
- faintness
- trembling
- nausea
- visual fixation on the other driver
- facial distortion

- back pain
- neck cramp

### Emotional Reactions

- outbursts of anger
- yelling
- aggressive gestures
- looking mean and glaring
- threatening with dangerous vehicle manipulation
- fantasies of violence and revenge
- panic
- regressive rigid pattern of behavior
- fear
- anxiety
- delusional talk against non-present drivers and objects

### Irrational Thoughts

- paranoid thinking that one is being followed or inspected
- addressing other drivers who are not within ear shot
- script writing scenarios involving vengeance and cruelty against "guilty" drivers
- denial of reality and defensiveness when a passenger complains of a driver's error
- psychopathic interactions as when two drivers alternately tailgate each other dangerously at high speed

Know that these reactions are to the extreme, but they are very real and when acted upon, can result in dangerous circumstances for both you and others on the road with you. Start by acknowledging that another driver has done something that isn't so smart and you can control your reaction to them.

Then begin telling yourself that you can work your way through your anger by letting it go right out the window. It's certainly a common reaction to yell or gesture to someone else when they are annoying you, but if you must do this, do it with the windows closed and where they can't see you.

Say things to yourself such as "They cut me off and that makes me very angry, but maybe they didn't see me" or "That was a real bonehead thing to do, but I'm just going to go ahead and get to work

like I need to." When you start talking to yourself in a positive way, your thinking will guide you toward being a safe driver instead of a driver with road rage.

Actually, there is a national study that has examined road rage and aggressive driving. The researchers have determined that you can drive with some sort of emotional intelligence.

## **DRIVE WITH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

There are 10 basic skills that you need to possess in order to drive with competence. Driving with emotional intelligence involves identifying problem areas and then taking steps to change your thinking so you will be a better and less aggressive driver thus less prone to violent behaviors while behind the wheel.

Consider the following driving competencies along with a non-intelligent response then change your own thinking toward the emotionally intelligent response instead.

1. Focusing on self vs. blaming others or the situation

Not Emotionally Intelligent: "This traffic is impossibly slow. What's wrong with these jerks. They're driving like idiots."

Emotionally Intelligent: "I'm feeling very impatient today. Everything seems to tick me off."

2. Understanding how feelings and thoughts act together

Not Emotionally Intelligent: "I'm angry, scared, outraged. How can they do this to me."

Emotionally Intelligent: "I feel angry, scared, outraged when I think about what could have happened."

3. Realizing that anger is something we choose vs. thinking it is provoked

Not Emotionally Intelligent: "They make me so mad when they do that."

Emotionally Intelligent: "I make myself so mad when they do that."

4. Being concerned about consequences vs. giving in to impulse

Not Emotionally Intelligent: "I just want to give this driver a piece of my mind. I just want him to know how I feel."

Emotionally Intelligent: "If I respond to this provocation I lose control over the situation. It's not worth it."

5. Showing respect for others and their rights vs. thinking only of oneself

Not Emotionally Intelligent: "They better stay out of my way. I'm in no mood for putting up with them. Out of my way folks."

Emotionally Intelligent: "I wish there was no traffic but it's not up to me. These people have to get to their destination too."

6. Accepting traffic as collective team work vs. seeing it as individual competition

Not Emotionally Intelligent: "Driving is about getting ahead. I get a jolt out of beating a red light or finding the fastest lane. It's me vs. everybody else."

Emotionally Intelligent: "I try to keep pace with the traffic realizing that my movements can slow others down—like switching lanes to try to get ahead."

7. Recognizing the diversity of drivers and their needs and styles vs. blaming them for what they choose to do

Not Emotionally Intelligent: "How can they be so stupid? They're talking on the phone instead of paying attention to the road."

Emotionally Intelligent: "I need to be extra careful around drivers using a hand held cellular phone since they may be distracted."

8. Practicing positive role models vs. negative

Not Emotionally Intelligent: "Come on, buddy, speed up or I'll be on your tail. Go, go. What's wrong with you. There's no one ahead."

Emotionally Intelligent: "This driver is going slower than my desires. Now I can practice the art of patience and respect for the next few minutes."

9. Learning to inhibit the impulse to criticize by developing a sense of driving humor

Not Emotionally Intelligent: "I can't stand all these idiots on the road. They slow down when they should speed up. They gawk, they crawl, anything but drive."

Emotionally Intelligent: "I'm angry, I'm mad. Therefore I'll act calm, I'll smile and not compete. Already I feel better. Be my guest, enter ahead."

10. Taking driving seriously by becoming aware of one's mistakes and correcting them

Not Emotionally Intelligent: "I'm an excellent driver, assertive and competent, with a clean accident record—just a few tickets here and there."

Emotionally Intelligent: "I monitor myself as a driver and keep a driving log of my mistakes. I think it's important to include thoughts and feelings, not just the overt acts."

The next time you find yourself overcome with anger over a driving situation, try the following steps to change your way of thinking.

- **Obsessing about slow traffic** - "At this rate we'll never get there" , "I feel like I'm going backwards" , "Now I'm stuck behind this slow driver" etc

Leave earlier; Give up getting there on time; Distract yourself with radio or music; Admire the scenery; Practice yoga breathing

- **Feeling combative with self-righteous indignation** - "This jerk just cut me off— I've gotta give him a piece of

my mind" , "I don't deserve to be pushed around" ,  
"Nobody gives me the finger and gets away with it"  
"Nobody should fool with me and get away with it"; etc.

Make funny animal sounds; Make up some possible  
excuses for that driver; Think about your parents and  
children who might do the same thing; Think about being a  
saint

- **Feeling excessively competitive** - "Darn, that guy made  
the light and I didn't" , "How come that lane is faster than  
this one" , "Those pedestrians better watch out—I'm  
coming through" , etc.

Tell yourself it's just a habit from childhood to feel anxious  
about not winning, or being left behind; Remind yourself it  
feels good to be civil and helpful

- **Being over-critical** - "Look at that idiot who forgets to  
turn off his signal" , "I can't stand it the way he slows  
down and speeds up, slows down and speeds up" , "How  
can he pay attention to the road if he's babbling on the  
phone"

Tell yourself it's human to make mistakes; Recall to  
yourself your own mistakes; Remind yourself that patience  
is a virtue; Try to maneuver your car away from that car

- **Love of risk taking** - "I like to go fast, but I'm careful" ,  
"I can make this light if I speed up" , "I can squeeze into  
that opening if I time it right" , "I can insult that driver  
'cause I can get away fast" , etc.

Think of your loved ones and how they would feel if  
something happened to you; Tell yourself you prefer to be  
a mature and prudent person

There are certain situations you might find yourself in that  
require some special training and information.

## **STAY OUT OF HARM'S WAY**

There are times when driving can be scary. I remember one trip I took with my mom and my sister. We were merging onto the interstate from the on ramp. There was a large semi-truck that was coming up in the right hand lane. Driving courtesy – and, I believe, the law – says that he should get over into the left lane to let us merge.

My mom was driving and assumed he was going to get over like he should. Well, he didn't. She went ahead and merged ahead of him, but he kept barreling on down the highway. I saw the huge grill of his truck through the rear window bear down on us. She pulled over to the shoulder just in time before he sped past us.

It was probably one of the scariest moments of my life. I truly thought that semi was going to come right over the top of us. What was even scarier was the thought of my sister's fiancé who was actually run over from behind by a semi in a similar situation. He was left with some severe physical disabilities and will never be the same again. I thought we could have been in the same boat – or worse.

That's only one of the scary situations I have been involved in over the 20 plus years I've been driving. When I started this book, I thought about how often I was angered by careless drivers and how I could have reacted differently in many situations. It also got me thinking about what to do in various dangerous situations.

This section focuses on those situations and how you can protect yourself should some of these events present themselves to you.

## **Recognizing and Dealing With Drunk Drivers**

Imagine you are on the road driving home and you see someone driving erratically. What should you do? Think in advance about what your reactions will be in this situation. Following are some possible signs of drunk driving, as well as tips on what to do and what not to do. As soon as you see an erratic driver who you feel may be drunk, begin looking for a public building or convenience store where you could ask to make an emergency call. These tips can help keep you and others safe!

Here are some signs that someone on the road with you may be a drunk or impaired driver:

- Straddling center lane or lane marker.
- Almost striking and object or vehicle.
- Taking extremely wide turns.
- Weaving from one side of the road to the other.
- Driving on the wrong side of the road or on the shoulder.
- Driving at very slow speed - at least 10 mph below the limit.
- Following another car too closely.
- Narrowly missing another car or object by passing too closely.
- Braking erratically.
- Driving without headlights.
- Signaling inconsistently with what they are doing.
- Stopping inappropriately in places such as at green lights and crosswalks with no pedestrians, etc.

What should you do if you see someone exhibiting these behaviors? You could try dialing 911 and telling the police about it, but that's not necessarily a guarantee that this driver will be taken off the road. Here are some more practical solutions:

- Stay far behind the suspected drunk driver.
- Get out of the way and expect the unexpected.
- Wear your safety belt (and make sure that any children or other passengers have their safety belts fastened as well) - It is one of your best defenses against a drunk driver. |
- Stop right away and look for a phone.
- Report suspected and impaired drivers to the state or local police by dialing 911 or \*SP on your cellular phone. Give the location,

direction of travel, and description of the car and driver's behavior.

- Do not try to pass the car!
- Do not try to stop the vehicle.
- Do not follow too closely. The car may stop abruptly.
- Do not attempt to act in the capacity of the police. Do not try to detain or confront the driver. Call the police and let them take care of it!

Just as you should take precautions to drive safely, you should also be aware of how to park safely

## **Parking Safety**

Safety is important to safeguard you, your vehicle and your most important possessions:

- Keep your windows completely closed.
- Always lock your vehicle
- If parking during the evening, find a spot in the most well-lit area of the parking lot.
- Always consider your path of travel to and from your vehicle and park in an area that will allow you to walk to your destination along the most well traveled and well lit sidewalks.
- Do not park in isolated locations or behind obstructions that block you from the view of others.
- Consider the time when you will return to your vehicle when choosing a parking location. It may be dark when you return. It is often advisable to relocate your vehicle before dark to a closer parking space for your return after dark.
- **Be aware!** As you approach your vehicle, observe everything and look for things out of the ordinary. Also, check inside both

front and back seat before you get inside.

- Have your keys in hand as you approach your vehicle. Don't linger, get right in and then immediately lock your car.
- Trust your instincts and seek help at the first sign of danger.
- If possible, ask a friend to accompany you to your vehicle.
- Carry small loads, and keep your hands free.
- Avoid parking beside large vehicles such as trucks or vans which can provide a convenient shield from eye-witnesses.
- Never leave your mail visible within your vehicle, your address will provide a clue as to whether you are male or female, and give anyone information as to your home address.
- Be aware of your surroundings. Walk with confidence and purpose. When a criminal selects a victim, in many cases they're looking for someone who appears vulnerable or out of place.
- Do not leave tempting valuables or property visible inside your vehicle. Lock these items out of sight in your trunk or leave them at home.

Taking charge of your personal safety should also be a learned behavior.

## **Personal Safety**

Your safety can be in question when you least expect it. Keep these important points in mind:

- Do not stop to aid disabled motorists. Telephone for help instead.

If you are in need of help, never go with a stranger who offers help. Instead, ask them to call for help for you.

- Never roll down your window to talk to a stranger. If required, roll the window down only enough to be heard.

- If your vehicle becomes disabled, attach a white cloth to the door handle or antenna. Lock the doors and stay in the vehicle. If someone stops to help, don't open your door or window. Ask the person to please telephone for help.
- It's a good idea to carry a cell phone in your car, making it possible for you to call for help for yourself or someone else.
- If you believe you're being followed, drive immediately to the nearest police station, or a well lit and well populated service area. You could stay in your vehicle and sound the horn or go into a safe location and call the police.
- When stopped at an intersection leave enough space so that you can see the tires of the car in front of you. That will allow you to pull around that vehicle and not be blocked in.

## **Driving On Ice**

You don't have to live in a wintry climate to encounter icy roads and hazardous roadways. In temperatures at or just above 32-degrees, a thin layer of water can turn to or cover ice, causing extremely dangerous, slippery driving conditions. You could be putting yourself in harm's way to predators and unscrupulous people if you find yourself stuck because of icy conditions.

### 1. Know Your Vehicle

Not all cars respond the same to icy, slippery roads. For that reason, knowing how to handle your vehicle and how it responds in various weather conditions is important.

AAA recommends that motorists practice slow-speed maneuvers on an empty snow or ice covered parking lot. You should also page through your owner's manual, familiarizing yourself with your vehicle's braking system and tire traction.

### 2. Distance Factor

The most important thing to remember when driving on slick roads is that you must travel, steer and brake more slowly than usual. The distance needed to stop on ice is twice as long as that you would need to brake under normal driving circumstances.

This means you should keep at least a three car distance from the vehicle directly in front of you.

### 3. Black Ice

Black ice is defined as ice that remains on roadways that are not subjected to direct sunlight. Black ice commonly forms on roads that wind around lakes and rivers, in tunnels, on overpasses and in highly shaded, rural areas. Black ice is almost invisible to the naked eye. Be especially leery when driving your car into shaded areas, and slow your vehicle down during your approach.

### 4. Extra Slippery Areas

Certain areas of roadways, because of location or lack of direct sunlight, are almost always more hazardous than others. Use extra caution when driving on bridges, overpasses and tunnels.

### 5. Front Wheel Drive

Front wheel drive vehicles handle better than rear wheel drive on slippery roads because the weight of the engine is on the drive wheels, which helps to improve your traction.

### 6. Rear Wheel Drive

Because there is virtually no weight on the rear wheels of your car, vehicles that operate by using rear wheel drive tend to slide from side to side during turns on icy roads. Cars and light duty truck owners can place bags of sand or kitty litter in the bed of the truck or trunk to help balance the weight, and distribute it equally.

### 7. Know Your Brakes

Your owner's manual will provide information about your braking system. Not all braking systems are the same. Find out which type of brakes your vehicle uses and then, follow the safety steps below.

Anti-lock braking systems (ABS) offer significant advantages on slick roads, if used correctly. To operate ABS effectively, motorists should apply steady pressure to the brake pedal during the entire stop. ABS will automatically pump the brakes, if

necessary, to keep the wheels from locking. Never manually pump ABS brakes yourself. Apply only steady pressure continuously until you come to a complete stop.

If you don't have ABS, you should gently apply pumping pressure to your brakes during slippery conditions. Do not apply steady pressure to your brakes. Standing on your brakes will only cause wheel lock, and may result in your car spinning out of control.

## 8. Handling Skidding

**FRONT WHEEL DRIVE:** The biggest problem facing most winter drivers is skidding on slick, icy or snow covered roads. It is possible to steer out of a skid! Once you feel your car begin to skid, slowly remove your foot from the accelerator, until you feel your wheels regain traction control. (Do not attempt to brake!) As your vehicle's tires grab the road, slowly turn the steering wheel in the direction you want your front wheels to go.

**REAR WHEEL DRIVE:** When you begin to spin, remove your foot from the gas pedal. Slowly steer in the direction you want the car to go. If you are still skidding out of control, counter-steer until your vehicle is pointing in the right direction. Never apply steady pressure to the brakes.

## 9. More Tips

You can improve your **VISIBILITY** by clearing all snow and ice from your vehicle. Be sure to remove ice and snow from hood, roof, trunk, turn signal lights, tail and headlights, windows, mirrors and fenders.

Use your **LOW BEAMS** when driving in an ice or snow storm. You'll have better visibility.

Allow for greater **STOPPING DISTANCE** during snow and ice storms. In order to bring your car to a safe stop, you must allow 8-10 seconds between you and the vehicle in front of you.

Remember that **POSTED SPEED LIMITS** are only to be followed during ideal weather conditions. Slow down while driving on snow or ice.

When driving UPHILL on ice, pick a path that will allow the most traction. Monitor vehicles in front of you and steer clear of areas where they spin wheels or slide backward. Unpacked snow will give most vehicles sufficient uphill traction.

To maintain control on CURVES and TURNS, reduce speed just before the turn. Any sudden acceleration or deceleration during a turn will send you into a skid.

NEVER brake while driving on ice. If you are approaching a patch of ice, brake during your approach. Applying pressure to your brakes while on ice will only throw you into a skid.

Maintain your TIRES. Tires that are in proper working condition and are adequately inflated provide better traction.

Travel GENTLY. Everything you do on icy roads will affect how your vehicle handles the situation. Move slowly. Turn slowly. Brake slowly. Sudden changes can cause your car to spin out of control.

Carry an emergency weather kit with you in your trunk or somewhere in your car. It doesn't matter if you live in an area that has specific weather related traffic problems; it's always a good idea to be prepared in the event of an emergency.

Make a box or a bag containing the following items:

- Battery jumper cables
- First aid kit
- Shovel
- Basic tools (pliers, wrench, screwdriver and knife)
- Blankets
- Extra clothing (hats, socks, boots, mittens)
- Flashlight
- Bag of sand
- Cellular phone or CB Radio

Many people, myself included, have problems driving at night.

## **Driving At Night**

Though there is usually less traffic during nighttime hours, nearly half of all fatal traffic collisions occur after dark. This is because most drivers are not aware of the dramatic difference that darkness can make in their ability to cope with even the most normal driving situations.

It causes a great deal of difference in the way that we see our surroundings. It can increase the normal feelings of weariness or fatigue that we experience when driving over long distances. And it makes us much more vulnerable to dangerous situations on the road.

## 1. Your Vision

One of the most important differences between day and night time driving conditions is the way in which we see our surroundings. We become completely dependent upon artificial sources of light to show us where we are.

We are also much more sensitive to bright lights and other distractions on the road ahead. For this reason, you should study road maps and other written directions carefully before starting out at night.

Also, watch carefully for highway signs, pedestrians, animals, slow-moving vehicles, motorcycles, and bicycles that may be on the road ahead of you. All of them are more difficult to see at night.

If you have a passenger in the seat next to you, he or she can serve as a "second pair of eyes" for you. Have him/her keep a close watch for road signs and unexpected hazards on the road ahead.

Eye fatigue is a particularly difficult problem when driving at night. To relieve this problem or prevent it from happening, keep your eyes moving...from side to side, near to far ahead, and so forth.

Keep all windows and mirrors in your vehicle clean and free of defects. They should never be clouded by frost or steam, or marred by large scratches or cracks.

## 2. Using Your Headlights

It is illegal to drive any motor vehicle on public roads after dark without using the correct lighting equipment. This includes headlights, tail lights, and license plate light. Parking lights should be used for parking only, they are not considered strong enough, even in the hours just after sunrise and before sunset.

You must have your lights on from sunset until sunrise during periods of rain, snow, hail, sleet or fog, and during other periods when you cannot see the road ahead of you clearly for a distance of at least 500 feet. When you are in doubt as to whether you should use your lights or not, turn them on -- low beam. Not only will this improve your own vision, it helps others to see you as well.

One of the most common and dangerous habits that drivers can get into at night is "overdriving" the headlights of their vehicle. You should never drive so fast that you are unable to stop within the distance that you can clearly see on the road ahead of you by the light of your vehicle's head lamps. For most vehicles this distance is no more than 350 feet when the headlights are on high beam.

In bad weather or other driving conditions when your ability to see clearly is decreased, this distance can be much less. Remember, total stopping distance is the distance your vehicle will travel from the moment the hazard appears until your vehicle comes to a complete stop.

Therefore, because you cannot see as far ahead at night, you need to slow down to give yourself more distance to stop your vehicle. The minimum stopping distance for a vehicle with normal brakes traveling 55 M.P.H. under favorable road and weather conditions is approximately 230 feet.

You should never have your vehicle's headlights on high beam when you are within 1000 feet of an oncoming vehicle. You should also switch to low beam when you are following another vehicle at a distance of 200 feet or less. Not dimming your lights when you are this close to another vehicle is not only dangerous to the other driver, it is illegal.

If you do not dim your lights you could cause the other driver to have an accident. If the vehicle is coming towards you, your vehicle could be involved as well. Also, if you dim your lights the

other driver is likely to do so as well. If this does not happen you should keep your lights on low beam anyway. If you do not, you are risking more than possibly blinding the other driver. You are endangering yourself as well.

Keep your vehicle's lighting equipment clean and in good working condition. It is particularly important to keep the lenses of your lights clean.

### 3. Avoid Glare

Glare can seriously lessen your ability to see clearly. Many times it can even cause temporary blindness. After dark the most common type of glare you will encounter is that of oncoming headlights, or the reflection of headlights in your rear view mirror from vehicles following you.

If you turn your eyes away from the glare it becomes less serious. You can do this with oncoming traffic by looking toward the right side of the road and watching the white line marking the outside edge of the traffic lane.

For glare caused by headlights from behind you, use a "day-night" mirror or adjust your regular mirror to cut out as much of the bright light as possible. It may also help to reduce your speed until your eyes recover from the glare. Be careful not to reduce your speed drastically when you have vehicles following you.

### 4. Adjust Your Speed

Because of decreased visibility, driving too fast is more dangerous after dark than during the day. You can only see as far ahead as your headlights carry. At high speeds this does not give you enough time or distance to stop when you see something dangerous on the road ahead.

It is a good idea to allow more following distance while driving at night in case you or the vehicle ahead of you must make a sudden stop. Highway speed limits are there for good reason, so be sure to obey them even if you are familiar with the roadway.

Highway speed limits are set for many reasons, but one of the most important is that they protect you from the unexpected.

For instance, a deer may suddenly leap out on the road in front of you. There may be an accident ahead that has not yet been reported and your path may be blocked. Bad weather may have torn up or washed out the road or bridge ahead.

Besides these situations, there are also times when you may be distracted or suffer some sort of attack while behind the wheel. In these cases, your chances of surviving would be much better if you were driving at a lower, safer speed.

## 5. Handling Emergencies

Emergencies are always worse after dark than during daylight hours. There is less traffic and fewer chances for assistance. You have fewer choices of action and you are far more vulnerable to danger.

Here are some "do's" and "don'ts" for road emergencies after dark:

- Pull your vehicle off the main highway as far as possible. If there is a shoulder, use it.
- Turn on emergency flashers if you have them. If not, leave your headlights on low beam and turn on your right turn signal.
- Put up the hood of the car unless it is raining or snowing.
- If you have flares or reflectors place them from 100 to 500 feet behind your vehicle on the right-hand edge of the main roadway. This will warn other traffic where your vehicle is parked. Also, tie a white cloth to the radio antenna or door handle to let emergency personnel know you need assistance.
- If possible stay with the vehicle until help comes, especially if you are on an interstate freeway. The State Patrol monitors freeways with more frequency and a patrol car will be along at regular intervals.
- If you must leave your vehicle carry a flashlight or lantern. Walk on the left-hand side of the road or left shoulder,

facing traffic.

- Never leave your vehicle and walk on the traveled portion of the freeway. This is not only very dangerous, it is illegal.

None of us want to be involved in a car accident, but if you do find yourself in that position, it helps to know what to do first.

## **If You're In An Accident**

Car accidents can be very stressful. Read the tips below to learn what you should do if you're involved in a car accident.

- Stay calm. Keeping a normal demeanor helps you stay in control of the situation.
- Make sure you and your passengers are OK. Move as far off the roadway as possible, but stay at the scene of the accident. Warn oncoming traffic by activating your hazard warning lights and/or setting flares.
- Call the police to report the accident.
- Contact your insurance company and report the claim. The sooner your insurance company knows about the accident, the sooner they can start working to resolve your claim.
- Do not admit fault for the car accident or discuss the car accident with anyone other than the police and your claims representative.
- Exchange vital information with the other driver involved in the car accident. Write down the name, address, phone number and license numbers for all drivers and witnesses, particularly those who were not riding in a vehicle involved in the accident. Ask for the insurance companies and policy numbers for drivers involved in the car accident.

Finally, fatigued or sleepy drivers can be not only more prone to road rage, but they are a big cause of accidents on the roadways.

## **Dealing With A Fatigued or Sleepy Driver**



Similar to the way drinking driving emerged as a road safety issue 30 years ago, impairment by fatigue, or drowsy driving, is fast becoming a major concern in North America. It can be just as deadly as drinking and driving or unsafe speed.

Sleep and fatigue often leave no clues for investigators to trace. Unlike alcohol-related crashes, no blood, breath, or other test is currently available to determine levels of sleepiness at the time of a crash. This leaves investigators with little hard data on which to base a conclusion of fatigue or sleep as a cause or contributing factor.

Despite the data limitations, estimates say that about five per cent of fatal crashes are firmly established as being caused by drowsy driving.

Experts suggest the actual number may be as high as 20 per cent to 40 per cent. And that makes drowsy driving as dangerous as drinking and driving, which accounts for approximately 24 per cent of all victims in vehicle fatalities.

### Characteristics of fatigue-related crashes

- Usually occur during late night/early morning or late afternoon.
- A single vehicle, driver is alone and drives off the road (but also a factor in rear-end and head-on crashes).
- No skid marks, brake lights, horn sounded, or other evidence the driver tried to avoid the crash.
- The crash occurs on a high-speed road, usually a highway in non-urban areas where more long distance night time driving occurs.
- The crash is likely to be serious, usually due to the high speeds involved combined with delayed (if any) reaction time.

Although no driver is immune, three groups are at highest risk:

1. Younger people ages 16–29 years, especially males. A combination of lifestyle factors such as schoolwork demands, part-time jobs, extracurricular activities and late-night

- socializing.
2. Shift workers whose sleep is disrupted by working at night or working long or irregular hours.
  3. People with untreated or unrecognized sleep apnea syndrome (SAS) or narcolepsy (sudden onset of brief attacks of daytime deep sleep, or micro-sleeps).

## CONCLUSION

People easily grow tired of the "idiots" they see on roads every day. Many develop road rage by giving in to their own frustration.

The only problem with giving in to road rage is that it can often get you into a lot of trouble. Others can be just as enraged as you are, and their reaction to you may be down right dangerous.

You should always avoid road rage. Back off and calm down. This is hard for some people. Still, it would be nice to let them know how you feel, without endangering yourself or the general public.

Road rage is a relatively serious act: it may be seen as an endangerment of public safety. It is, however, not possible to judge intent by external observation, so "road ragers" who are stopped by police may be charged only with relatively minor offences such as careless or reckless driving.

It is, however, likely that those causing serious injury or death during "road rage" incidents will suffer more serious penalties than those applicable to similar outcomes from simple negligence.

If you find yourself becoming excessively angry while driving, take a moment and calm down. Realize that many mistakes can be made by other drivers and that they aren't necessarily doing something to make you mad.

While it's true that there are many drivers on the road who are excessively aggressive. When you come across people like that, simply remove yourself from the situation. Pull off to the side of the

road or exit off the highway. Nothing good can come from confronting people like that.

Just go about your business and drive safely for your own sake and those who love you. Road rage is only perpetuated when drivers perpetuate it. You can stop road rage by stopping yourself before it gets too far. Start today and make the roads safer.

The following websites were referenced in researching this book:

[www.roadragers.com](http://www.roadragers.com)  
[www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)  
[www.drdriving.com](http://www.drdriving.com)  
[www.askmen.com](http://www.askmen.com)

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