

**PART 1—THE ART OF
POLITE DRIVING**

2 BEING POLITE AND COMPASSIONATE

Older Drivers

Driving in communities prevalent with older motorists requires a higher level of defensive driving as well as compassion. One reason for this is that as the human body ages, the eye's lens loses the ability to change focus quickly, peripheral vision narrows, and the retina becomes less sensitive to light. Consequently, an older driver who is focusing on something a certain distance ahead may not readily see you pulling out in front of them.

Also, older minds react more slowly because age lengthens the time it takes the brain to process information. Reacting to a situation while driving involves the three steps of sensing, deciding, and acting. So be patient if an elderly driver in front of you does not react immediately when the traffic light changes from red to green. And do not become edgy if they do not pull out onto a roadway even though *you* think they have a clear and obvious opening.

Medications also can interfere with driving by making the driver drowsy or distracted. And as we age, we often need to take more and different types of medication. Just as some people may take allergy medication that makes them drowsy, older drivers may need medications day and night. So be particularly careful when driving in retirement communities. Also, remember to be compassionate; you will be an older driver one day.

PART 2—DRIVING ENVIRONMENTS

3 URBAN DRIVING

Turning on Red

[A major] concern is what can be considered “ambiguous legalities.” For instance, you have the green light and have turned left on a street or boulevard and are now sitting in the median crossover at a red light. The car beside you, which has just made the same turn, pauses, then proceeds through the red light. Was this driver running a red light or completing a left turn? Chances are they are running a red light if the median crossover is longer than 32 feet.

If the distance between intersections is 31 feet or less, the driver may proceed through the red light completing a left turn. If, on the other hand, the median crossover is 32 feet or longer, the driver is running a red light. As a general rule—especially if you are not carrying around a tape measure—is “if the vehicle would be protruding into the street after turning (or partially turning) left, the distance is probably less than 32 feet making the maneuver completing a left turn.

Railroad Crossings

Between 1978 and 1993 the number of railroad accidents declined by 75 percent, automobile collisions with trains still occur.

4 SUBURBAN/RESIDENTIAL DRIVING

Bicyclists, Skateboarders, and Inline Skaters

In 1996 alone, 761 pedalcyclists were killed.

5 INTERSTATE DRIVING

Blind Spots

Here is a trick to help you eliminate your blind spots: When looking into your rearview and side mirrors, adjust the side mirrors so that you see the front bumper of a vehicle that is passing you at the same you see the rear bumper of the same vehicle in your rearview mirror. It will take a little getting used to but will help to eliminate your blind spots because as the rear bumper moves past your side mirror, you will begin to see the front of the vehicle with your peripheral vision.

Speed

In 1993, 53,343 drivers were involved in fatal traffic crashes in the U.S. and 11,019 were speeding. Motorists have a number of reasons for driving in excess of the posted speed limit as listed below.

- Judgment is impaired by alcohol or drugs.
- The driver is in a hurry, probably because poor planning is making them late. Remember, just because *you* are late does not mean everyone else must hurry to get out of your way. “Poor planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on everyone else’s part.” Patience is not only a virtue but also a life-saving practice.
- The driver intends to maintain a speed “acceptably” over the limit.
- Drivers often equate beating traffic with high self-esteem, especially when they see another speeding car.
- Speeding is inadvertent, that is, the driver fails to realize that they are exceeding the speed limit.

6 RURAL DRIVING

In 1995, the fatality rate on rural interstate highways was twice the rate as that on urban interstates. Moreover, rural fatal automobile accidents compared with urban fatal crashes have a larger proportion of crashes with the following characteristics:

- More than one person per vehicle and more than one fatality per crash
- A single vehicle
- A truck or van involved
- A vehicle rollover (Forty-six percent of the sport utility vehicles involved in fatal crashes in rural areas experienced rollover.)
- Striking a fixed object
- Severe vehicle damage
- A head-on collision
- Ejected persons with serious injury (A considerable danger here is spinal injury caused by the physiology of being thrown, while in the sitting position, from a vehicle.)

Wildlife

In 1995, collisions with animals, particularly deer, represented approximately 275,000 of all crashes in the United States and killed 111 people according to data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Fatal Accident Reporting System. The most dangerous times of day for deer-related crashes are in the early evening and early morning—the most active time for deer. The most dangerous time of year is during the mating season, in November and December.

7 OFF-ROAD DRIVING

2,414 deaths were associated with three- and four-wheel ATVs from 1982 to 1993. And in 1994, four-wheeled ATVs accounted for 67 percent of all ATV-related fatal incidents.

All-Terrain Vehicle Regulation Act (Legislative Findings)

- A. Injuries associated with ATV use have more than tripled between 1983 and 1986.
- B. Annual emergency room treatments of injuries related to ATV use increased from 8,600 in 1982 to 26,900 in 1983 to 63,900 in 1984 to 85,900 in 1985.
- C. Nearly half of all individuals injured in ATV accidents are under 16 years of age.
- D. Over half of all individuals injured in ATV accidents do not wear any type of protective equipment.
- E. Three-wheel ATVs are particularly dangerous and create a substantial risk of injury to operators.

Rules and Regulations

Operation on streets, roads, and highways is prohibited. The crossing of a street, road, or highway is permitted only under the conditions listed below.

- A. The crossing is made at a 90-degree angle to the direction of the highway and at a place where no obstruction prevents a quick and safe crossing.
- B. The vehicle is brought to a complete stop before crossing the shoulder or main traveled way of the highway.
- C. The operator yields the right-of-way to all oncoming traffic that constitutes an

immediate potential hazard.

- D. In crossing a divided highway, the crossing is made only at an intersection of the highway with another public street, road, or highway.
- E. If equipped, both the headlight and taillight are on when the crossing is made. The crossing of any interstate or limited-access highway is not permitted.

PART 3—ROAD RAGE

8 DANGEROUS DRIVING

Approximately two billion episodes of road rage are reported every year in the U.S., and that incidents of aggressive driving killed approximately 29,000 Americans in 1996. Also, 83 percent of commercial drivers are involved in road rage incidents. A total of all deaths from incidents of road rage is displayed in table 3 below.

INCIDENTS 1/1/90 to 9/1/96	
Year	Number Killed
1990	1,129
1991	1,297
1992	1,478
1993	1,555
1994	1,669
1995	1,708
1996	1,201

Table 3. Death Rates Over 6¾ Years

In January 1995, the Automobile Association surveyed 526 motorists regarding driver aggression and found that 90 percent experienced road rage and 60 percent admitted that they lost their tempers behind the wheel.

Everyday aggression may include what is considered “expected speeding” (10–20 percent over the posted limit) as well as “unexpected speeding” (50–100 percent over the posted limit).

What Causes Driver Aggression?

In the past 10 years vehicle miles driven in the U.S. increased by 35 percent while the number of new roads increased by only 1 percent. The anonymity of being inside the vehicle—possibly with darkly tinted windows—and the ability to make a quick getaway can contribute to the willingness of a driver to act in an aggressive manner. Other reasons can include environmental influences, noise from within and outside the vehicle, temperature, and the individual choosing to drive to cool down after becoming angry instead of going for a long walk or using relaxation methods such as exercising, watching TV or films, or reading.

Specific Behavior

The best way to prevent acts of driver aggression is to not engage in behavior that provokes it. Data collected from a variety of sources such as police and insurance reports, personal interviews, and surveys identify specific behavior that sets off road rage as follows:

- Changing lanes or turning without signaling; cutting off other drivers; lane weaving
- Tailgating
- Gesturing obscenely
- Honking the horn
- Intentionally taking more than one parking space to prevent door dings on your vehicle
- Using high beams to punish other drivers
- Using cellular phones while driving
- Refusing to move out of the fast lane while driving below (or even at) the posted speed limit
- Making challenging eye contact

- Disregarding STOP signs

Justification

Although driver aggression can never be justified, those interviewed after engaging in such behavior often try to defend their actions. Below are reasons given for violent acts of road rage associated with at least 25 incidents that resulted in death or injury.

- “It was an argument over a parking space.”
- “He cut me off.”
- “She was driving too slowly.”
- “She would not let me pass.”
- “They kept tailgating me.”
- “I would have never shot him if he had not rear-ended me.”
- “He hit my car,” so I shot him to death.
- “Nobody gives me the finger.”
- “He was playing the radio too loud,” so I shot him.
- “The bastard kept honking and honking his horn.”
- “He would not turn off his high beams.”
- “He practically ran me off the road—what was I supposed to do?” (from a driver accused of murder)
- “We was dissed.” (from a teenager charged with murdering a passenger in another vehicle)

Statistics

From January 1, 1990 to September 1, 1996 a popular study was conducted on 10,037 incidents taken from 30 newspapers, reports from 16 police departments, and claim reports from insurance companies. The data below were compiled from

this study and are included throughout this chapter.

- An average of 1,500 incidents of road rage are reported annually with 12,610 men, women, and children being injured and 218 being killed. This represents an average increase of 7 percent every year.
- In 1990, there were 1,129 reported incidents of aggressive driving.
- In 1995, there were 1,708 reported incidents of aggressive driving.
- By the end of August 1996, 1,201 incidents of aggressive driving were reported.
- In the period of the study, the majority of aggressive drivers were 18–26 years of age, although hundreds were 26–50, and 86 were 50–75.
- Female offenders accounted for 4 percent.
- 322 incidents were the result of domestic violence.
- 38 incidents were the result of racism or hate.
- Firearms were used in 37 percent of incidences.
- Vehicles were used in 35 percent of incidences.

Weapons

Perhaps one of the best reasons to avoid aggressive drivers is their characteristic use of weapons. Even if an angered motorist is not actually carrying a firearm, they often will improvise with whatever is handy. In the review of the 10,037 incidents, it was found that weapons were used in 4,400 of the cases in the following order of frequency:

1. Firearms (37 percent)
2. Fists and feet
3. Tire irons and jack handles
4. Baseball bats (160)
5. Knives (includes bayonets, ice picks, razor blades, swords)

6. Hurlled projectiles (beer and liquor bottles (313), rocks, coins, soda cans, garbage such as partially eaten foods including hamburgers and burritos)
7. Clubs (crowbars, lead pipes, batons, 4 x 4 timbers, canes, tree limbs, wrenches, hatchets, golf clubs)
8. Defensive sprays (Mace and pepper spray)
9. Miscellaneous (eggs, water pistols, crossbow, speared in the head by a paint roller rod thrown through the windshield)

Drivers who assault other drivers may not limit their choice of weapons to those that are hand-wielded. Automobiles have been used to assault law enforcement personnel and their vehicles as well as other motorists. In the study period, it was found that automobiles used as weapons resulted in the deaths of 48 police officers and 38 drivers and passengers with as many as 23 percent of offenders using a vehicle and 12 percent using both a vehicle and a weapon. And motor vehicle use is not limited to cars; in at least 103 cases in the U.S., a bus, bulldozer, tractor-trailer, military tank, tow truck, or forklift was used intentionally to cause death or destruction, and 94 offenders used their “vehicle weapons” to destroy inanimate objects such as buildings and property.

Attacks by vehicles also have injured or killed whole groups of people from single incidents. Twenty-two drivers plowed into crowds of people, and this does not include those drivers whose accelerators stuck or who had heart attacks or seizures while behind the wheel. And using vehicles to attack others is not only a male-dominated occurrence; women accounted for 413 of the perpetrators with 285 using their vehicles as a weapon and 31 using their car to target police officers.

The most current information at the time of this writing regarding injury and accident statistics was compiled by The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and includes data accumulated for 1997 as shown below.

- Highway accidents killed approximately 42,000 people. This is 100 times more than airplane crashes. For instance, a jumbo jet would have to crash twice a week to total the number of automobile deaths, and a 2-a-week airline crash is only 0.002 percent of all flights.
- One-third to two-thirds of fatalities resulted from aggressive driving.
- 3.5 million people were injured badly enough to require medical attention.
- \$150 billion was the cost in medical and vehicle damages.

9 CONTROLLING ROAD RAGE: IT STARTS WITH YOU

Techniques for Avoiding Road Rage

A number of these techniques are listed below.

- Keep cool in traffic, be patient and courteous to other drivers, and correct unsafe driving habits likely to endanger, antagonize, or infuriate other motorists. Also, do not react to provocation.
- Avoid antagonizing displays such as a confederate flag or offensive bumper sticker.
- Move out of the right lane to allow others to merge.
- Move out of the left lane if others are tailgating.
- Do not pass on the right of heavy traffic and try to force your way in when there is ample and obvious warning that your right lane will be closed soon.
- Pull over if you are slowing traffic behind you.
- Do not block the road while talking to a pedestrian on the sidewalk.
- Know how to disarm your car alarm. Also, ensure it is set to turn off after a short time.
- Keep away from drivers behaving erratically.
- Avoid eye contact with hostile motorists.
- Do not take your eyes off the road.
- Avoid all conflict if possible. If challenged, take a deep breath and get out of the way.

If you feel you are prone to losing your temper, it is best to try to improve your

environment and perhaps your attitude. It could save your or someone else's life. Some ways to do this are listed below.

- Listen to soothing music or a book on tape; in general, concentrate on being relaxed.
- Practice relaxation techniques such as diaphragmatic breathing.
- Improve the comfort of your vehicle by adjusting climate controls to a comfortable level.
- Accept the fact that you eventually will encounter an aggressive driver and vow to not respond negatively.
- Learn to manage your anger.
- Do not drive when you are angry, upset, or overtired.
- Always be polite and courteous.
- Give the driver the benefit of the doubt by assuming that mistakes are not intentional or personal.
- Allow plenty of time for the trip to prevent becoming stressed.
- Understand that you cannot control the traffic, only your reaction to it.
- Alter your schedule to avoid the worst congestion.
- Adjust your attitude.

Although some acts of driver aggression are intentionally initiated by an angry motorist, often driver aggression can be prevented. Some final reminders for appropriate and courteous driving behavior are listed below.

General

- Do not block the passing lane. You should be able to see the headlights of the car behind you. If not, pull over and let them pass.
- Do not tailgate. You should leave at least a 2-second space between you and the car in front of you.

- Use turn signals.
- Do not use obscene hand gestures.
- Use the horn only in emergencies.
- Do not get in turn lanes at signal lights unless you intend to turn.

Parking

- Do not take more than one space.
- Do not hit other cars with your door.
- Do not tap the bumper while parallel parking.
- Do not park illegally in handicapped spaces.

Headlights

- Keep headlights on low beam, except when necessary to use the high beam.
- Dim high beams for oncoming traffic, and do not retaliate if others do not.
- Dim high beams when approaching a vehicle from the rear.
- Dim high beams when another vehicle is passing from the rear.

Other Measures

Experts on the subject of road rage have reached two conclusions: 1) Reducing aggressive driving behavior will not happen until people begin to recognize the behavior in themselves. 2) Very few people are willing to make such an admission, tending instead to blame the other driver. A few measures to help increase driver safety are listed below.

- Report aggressive behavior. Law enforcement officials are convinced that this feeling of freedom to act on angry, irrational impulses can be curtailed if more motorists reported unsafe or aggressive acts by calling #77 or *77. In Louisiana, the number for contacting the Louisiana State Police on a cellular

phone is *LSP (*577).

- Obey the speed limit and yellow speed advisory signs, which are based on traffic engineering factors such as minimum sight and stopping distances, and the density of homes and other buildings along the roadways.
- Ensure that driver education students have a detailed grasp of the rules of the road, signs, signals, and roadway markings.

**APPENDIX A—SLEEP
DEPRIVATION AND PORTABLE
PHONES**

Get Enough Sleep or Pay the Price

Keep in mind, however, that this number could be misleading since many states do not list sleepiness as a specific cause of accidents. A typical crash related to sleepiness has the characteristics listed below.

- The problem occurs during late night/early morning or mid-afternoon.
- The driver is alone in the vehicle.
- A single vehicle leaves the roadway.
- The crash occurs on a high-speed road.
- The crash is likely to be serious.
- The driver does not attempt to avoid the crash.

Sleep deprivation is not only a self-imposed phenomenon of young drivers but also results from physiological changes brought on by aging. One study found that after age 65, 13 percent of men and 36 percent of women reported taking more than 30 minutes to fall asleep. This could be caused by the reduced secretion of chemicals such as melatonin and growth hormones that regulate the sleep/wake cycle. Moreover, as we age, sleep becomes more shallow, fragmented, and variable in duration. And the less one sleeps at night the more inclined one is to do so during the day.

The facts referenced below provide some insight into sleep deprivation and driving.

- New York Thruway studies estimate that about one third of their fatal crashes are caused by drowsy drivers.
- Stimulants are no substitute for sleep. If you drink coffee and are seriously sleep-deprived, you are still likely to have “micro-sleeps,” which are brief naps that last around 4 or 5 seconds. (Also, coffee does not sober up an intoxicated driver; it only results in a jittery intoxicated driver.)
- You cannot tell when you are going to go to sleep.

- If you go to bed late and wake up early to an alarm clock, you probably are building up a “sleep debt” during the week. And the only way to get out of debt is to sleep.
- Being sleepy makes you misperceive things. You may think you see an animal moving on the road when in reality it is only a paper bag or dried leaf being blown by the wind.

It is extremely important to be able to recognize danger signs of sleep deprivation. Doing so, and taking the appropriate action, can save your life. If you experience any of the danger signs listed below, take them as a warning that you could inadvertently fall asleep while driving:

- Your eyes close or go out of focus frequently and by themselves.
- You have trouble keeping your head upright.
- You cannot stop yawning.
- You have wandering, disconnected thoughts.
- You do not remember driving the last few miles.
- You find yourself drifting between lanes, tailgating, or missing traffic signs.
- You keep jerking the car back into the lane.
- You have drifted off the road and narrowly missed crashing.

Cellular Telephones

One study found that simply having a cell phone in your vehicle increased the risk of being involved in an accident by up to 34 percent. And in early 1997, *The New England Journal of Medicine* published the results of another study analyzing cellular phone use and motor vehicle accidents. This study included 699 drivers in the Toronto area who had cellular telephones and were involved in collisions. The study showed that drivers using a cell phone were four to five times more likely to be in an accident than drivers who were not using a phone. Moreover, it was

estimated that cell phone users were at a risk of collision 3.0 to 6.5 times higher within 5 to 10 minutes after the phone call began.

Findings

Other findings in this particular study are listed below.

- The risk of collision was similar among such subgroups as male/female, type of job, driving experience, and experience using cell phones, though younger drivers were at a higher risk.
- The highest risk for collision was among those who were not high school graduates.
- Hands-free cell phones did not appear to be safer than hand-held models.

Reasons for the Risk

There are a number of reasons why it is thought that portable telephones are a hazard. For example, when you operate a cellular phone you are looking away from the road longer than when operating any other equipment in the car, such as the air conditioner or radio, and may fail to notice a stoplight, traffic sign, or a vehicle in front of you. And since you physically have to look at the phone while dialing you are looking neither ahead, behind in the mirrors, nor to the side.

Also, when operating a hand-held cellular phone, a driver is required to steer with one hand longer than usual, which is a big danger. Additionally, holding a phone to the side of the head creates a wide blind zone. Other reported hazards are listed below.

- Users are distracted from defensive driving practices and are less responsive to highway traffic situations. When they do react, response time is longer.
- Users are more likely to have intense conversations that involve problem solving, which is more distracting than casually conversing with a passenger.
- Passengers in the car often alert drivers to dangerous traffic situations, and

stop talking at such times, in contrast to someone on the other end of the line who is unaware of the driving environment.

Recommendations

A number of suggestions are listed below to help remind cell phone users to practice better safety.

- Keep conversations short, and develop ways to avoid long-winded talkers.
- Do not use the cell phone for social visiting.
- Assess traffic conditions before placing a call, and do not feel bad about hanging up—without warning if necessary—in tricky traffic situations.
- Position the phone within reach; if it is stored out of sight, be sure it is easy to access.
- Resist dialing a number while moving in heavy traffic; wait until you are at a traffic light or STOP sign, or are able to pull over. If you have a passenger, have them dial the number, or use a memory dial function if available.
- Keep even more distance between you and the car ahead of you than normal.
- Although some studies show that using a “hands-free” speaker phone system actually did not decrease the number of accidents of motorists using a cell phone, using such a system still allows you to keep your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road.

APPENDIX B—PEDESTRIAN STATISTICS

Pedestrian Statistics

Pedestrians account for a high number of fatalities and injuries involving motor vehicles. Although it is illegal to walk on an interstate highway, pedestrians do it anyway and pay the price as shown below.

- An average of 610 people per year have been killed on foot on an interstate highway since 1989.
- In 1996, 5,412 pedestrians were killed and 82,000 were injured.
- 10 percent of all pedestrian fatalities are on interstates.
- 12 percent of all interstate traffic fatalities are pedestrians.

ACTIVITY	NUMBER OF FATALITIES
Crossing or Entering	169
Pushing or Working on Vehicle	76
Involved in Previous Crash	31
Walking/Standing on Shoulder	27
Getting On or Off Vehicle	3
Walking in Roadway with Traffic	35
Walking in Roadway Against Traffic	11
Standing/Lying in Roadway	40
Hitch Hiking	11
Other Working in Roadway (Construction)	3
Playing in Roadway	1
Not Known	8
Other	4

Table 7. Activities Resulting in Pedestrian Deaths – Texas, Missouri, and North Carolina from 1991 to 1993

**APPENDIX C—REFERENCES,
SUGGESTED
READING/VIEWING, CONTACTS**

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