

How to Avoid and Manage Road Rage

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Many of us have been in driving situations where we either drove aggressively, experienced road rage, or we witnessed it from other drivers. According to the 2021 Traffic Safety Culture Index, nearly 90% of drivers rated aggressive driving as very or extremely dangerous, yet about 25% reported doing so in the past 30 days (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, 2022). Some common reasons for driving aggressively include running late, traffic congestion, clinical behaviors (e.g., anger management issues), and disregard for the law or others (DefensiveDriving.org, 2023).

While “aggressive driving” and “road rage” are used interchangeably, they actually have different legal definitions. Aggressive driving is a traffic offense and includes intentional behaviors that put other drivers at risk, like cutting someone off. Road rage is a criminal offense that includes intentional violent and extreme behaviors in response to an incident that puts other drivers in immediate risk, like “brake checking,” in which a driver slams their breaks after getting in front of a driver who cut them off (Brumberg, 2024). In Utah, road rage laws were amended in July 2024 with harsher penalties in response to an increase in road rage incidents and fatalities since

2020 (Remund, 2024). For example, between 2015-2019, aggressive driving fatalities averaged 13.4 deaths per year, and then increased to an average of 27.5 deaths per year between 2020-2023 (Utah Department of Transportation, n.d.).

Whether it’s aggressive driving or it escalates to road rage, the outcome can be dangerous for the driver exhibiting the behaviors and the recipient of the behavior, including accidents and fatalities. The following tips are helpful in situations where you might need to avoid or manage aggressive driving (DefensiveDriving.org, 2023; Hackensack Meridian Health, 2022):

- Practice polite driving habits, such as staying out of the left lane if you’re moving slower than the rest of traffic.
- Don’t drink alcohol or take any substances that will impact judgement and mood. They can cause someone to be upset more easily, drive drowsy, or have a slow reaction time, among others.
- Don’t take a driver’s actions personally, whether they are driving too slow or too fast.
- Give yourself extra time to get to your destination so you feel less rushed.
- Practice stress reduction techniques in the moment, like breathing slowly or counting to 10. This can help reframe the situation and lessen anxiety or anger before reacting.
- Don’t respond to the driver’s actions, such as by honking the horn, using hand gestures, yelling, or responding with a similar behavior.
- If you notice an aggressive driver reacting to you or others, get away from them by either changing lanes or slowing down.

If a driver continues to be aggressive toward you, drive to a safe and public location like a hospital or police station (not your house), stay in your car, and call 911. If they follow you and engage or attack you, keep your doors locked and windows closed, don’t respond, and wait for emergency personnel to arrive. You can also honk your horn to draw attention (DefensiveDriving.org, 2023; Hackensack Meridian Health, 2022).

Tensions can run high when dealing with other drivers, especially when we are in a hurry or there is road congestion. Just remember to focus on getting to your destination safely and remember that others are trying to do the same.

References

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