

Aggressive Driving

It can happen in an instant. You're driving along a pleasant stretch of road, calm and attentive, when a vehicle suddenly zooms up behind you, filling your rear-view mirror, and flashing its headlights in a bold show of impatience. Maybe you're able to change lanes and allow your tormentor to speed angrily by. Maybe you're forced to endure a blaring horn or obscene gestures. Regardless, your attention is diverted; you're a victim of aggressive driving.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) defines 'aggressive driving' as the "operation of a motor vehicle in a manner that endangers or is likely to endanger persons or property." Unlike 'road rage,' which is defined as "an assault with a motor vehicle or other dangerous weapon by the operator or passengers of another motor vehicle or an assault precipitated by an incident that occurred on a roadway," aggressive driving is a traffic offense. The aggressive driver disregards other drivers and does unlawful things, such as speeding, improper or excessive lane changing, failing to signal his/her intentions, and illegally passing (e.g., on the shoulder of the roadway).

What makes a driver 'aggressive?'

Stress, fatigue, emotional problems, alcohol and drug use, general disregard for other drivers all tend to make for an aggressive driver. None of these 'issues' justify aggressive driving. As a driver, you must focus on driving safely and recognize the potential consequences of driving aggressively.

When driving, you need to focus on the task. While driving, you should:

- Not be distracted by talking on your cell phone (even hands-free devices), eating, drinking, putting on makeup, etc.
- Make sure you have had proper rest and meals, and try to relax.
- Plan your route in advance so that you are not confused along the way.
- Stay within the speed limit and adjust your driving speed for road conditions.
- Signal your intentions far enough in advance to make other drivers aware of your plans.
- Never allow a deadline to supersede your driving safely.

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What if you are confronted by an aggressive driver?

First and foremost, don't allow an aggressive driver to turn you into one. If you are confronted with an aggressive driver, you should:

- Make every effort to get out of their way. You don't want to have an accident because of their stupidity.
- Avoid eye contact with the aggressive driver. Remember, they have a problem and you don't want to make the situation worse.
- Ignore gestures from the aggressive driver and don't return them. You are the better driver and have more control over your emotions.
- If the situation escalates, pull over in a safe location and call the police. Too frequently, aggressive drivers cross the line to road rage.

ALWAYS WEAR YOUR SAFETY BELT

Your safety and ability to control your vehicle are your primary defense against aggressive drivers. Always wear your safety belt when driving – it keeps you in the proper driving position and helps protect you in the event of an accident.

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