

Road safety factsheet: Road rage

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Driving, whether for work or leisure, can be enjoyable, but at times, it can be stressful and demanding. Drivers need to be fit, relaxed, and rested for the demands of safe travel. Good driving requires a responsible attitude towards other road users as well as a high level of concentration, observation, and anticipation. The reality is, however, that everyone makes mistakes.

Our attitude as drivers, how we deal with our own mistakes and our reaction to those made by others, will influence our own safety and wellbeing and that of other road users around us.

Aggressive, selfish, or impatient attitudes influence the way we drive. This can develop into a tendency to take irresponsible risks, such as tailgating, exceeding speed limits, undertaking, or jumping red lights.

Our emotional mood also influences our behaviour; drivers commonly express how they feel in the way they drive. Traffic delays and congestion can also influence our frame of mind. Life stresses such as relationship anxieties, financial or employment problems, domestic or workplace arguments (to highlight only a few) influence our mood and can affect our attitude to driving and safety behind the wheel.

Many drivers find different ways to keep calm but here are some suggestions on dealing with, and avoiding, potential conflict, "road rage" or red mist.

Before you set off

- When we are emotionally upset or psychologically caught up in something else, we are not able to give the road our full attention and so, do not drive safely. Try to ensure you are in a calm, good mood before driving.
- Plan time into journeys in case you are delayed by traffic; this can help to alleviate the pressure you feel if you're running late.

During your journey

- Whilst driving do not overreact to, or panic about, another road user's error, bad driving, or poor attitude. They may be unaware of their actions. Try to stay away from them and concentrate on driving well and within the law.
- Avoid getting into conflict with another road user. There will be some bad motorists who are looking for a reaction or conflict. "Competing" with another motorist could lead to the incident becoming serious. Keep your mind focused on your driving.

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- Stay calm and think logically – when confronted by an irate road user don't engage in gestures, headlight flashing or sounding the horn as this will serve no purpose and may exacerbate the situation. It will also distract you. Concentrate on driving responsibly.
- Refrain from eye contact with an angry or aggressive motorist as this has the potential to make the situation worse.
- If you find you are being followed by an impatient driver (tailgated) – do not allow yourself to be "pushed" along, intimidated, or made to increase your speed. Without pulling over or stopping – find a safe opportunity to allow that driver to pass. Circumnavigating a roundabout to enable tailgater to get past you will add little time to your journey but can make a significant difference to stress levels.
- If you find that an aggressive motorist is persistently following you – try to make your way to a public place, police station or busy street and if necessary, call the police. Do not allow an aggressive motorist to follow you home.
- Under no circumstances should you endanger your safety or well-being by getting out of the car to deal with an angry or aggressive motorist. If confronted with a road rage situation remain in the vehicle with the windows closed and doors locked. If necessary, call for help on a mobile phone (not while driving).
- If you accidentally cause another driver to become angry – hold up your whole hand as a friendly acknowledgement of your mistake – this can diffuse the situation.
- If your mood is affected by an incident during your journey, once you have moved away from any danger, find an opportunity to stop and take time out.
- Focus on the present and your driving rather than the destination or purpose of the journey.

After your journey

- If you can recognise when you're becoming stressed, angry, or impatient while driving, you will be better equipped to deal with these emotions. Try to find time occasionally to reflect on your driving and think about how mood or stress has affected your actions.