

In this chapter we will look at aggressive driving and road rage and how the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration defines them. Aggressive driving and road rage can cause many serious problems on the roadway. All drivers must be aware of both aggressive driving and the behavior known as road rage, and what to do when they occur. In this chapter we will also look at some of the things we can do to keep our emotions in check. At the end of this chapter is a road rage quiz. Over time we develop certain driving behaviors that may seem ok to us, but in actuality they may not be ok and might be interpreted by others as road rage. Check it out.

### **8.1 How To Handle Another Driver Exhibiting Road Rage/Being Aggressive**

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. It does not necessarily involve purposefully disregarding the safety of others”. An important distinction is that **aggressive driving is a traffic violation, while road rage, aside from the yelling and gesticulating, is a criminal offense.** Aggressive driving can result in tickets or violations, while road rage is a crime with criminal penalties that include jail time.

Road rage, on the other hand, is "an assault with a motor vehicle or other dangerous weapon by the operator or passenger(s) of one motor vehicle or precipitated by an incident that occurred on a roadway". Although California does not list road rage as a separate crime, the California Vehicle Code has a specific section about road rage: Vehicle Code Section 13210. This statute gives the DMV the authority to suspend a person's driver's license for engaging in road rage behaviors. The section states that “the suspension period...[for] road rage shall be six months for a first offense and one year for a second or subsequent offense.” More specifically, **CVC 13210 states:**

In addition to the penalties set forth in subdivision (a) of Section 245 of the Penal Code, the court may order the suspension of the driving privilege of any operator of a motor vehicle who commits an assault as described in subdivision (a) of Section 245 of the Penal Code on an operator or passenger of another motor vehicle, an operator of a bicycle, or a pedestrian and the offense occurs on a highway. The suspension period authorized under this section for an assault commonly known as “road rage,” shall be six months for a first offense and one year for a second or subsequent offense to commence, at the discretion of the court, either on the date of the person's conviction or upon the person's release from confinement or imprisonment. The court may, in lieu of or in addition to the suspension of the driving privilege, order a person convicted under this section to complete court-approved anger management or “road rage” course, subsequent to the date of the current violation.

While the only California statute to specifically mention road rage is Vehicle Code Section 13210 regarding DMV license suspensions, road rage can also be a criminal offense in California. Generally, road rage incidents in California are prosecuted as crimes under these statutes:

Reckless driving, Vehicle Code 23103.

Assault, Penal Code 240.

Assault with a deadly weapon, Penal Code 245(a)1.

Battery, Penal Code 242.

Brandishing a firearm, Penal Code 417.

Criminal threats, Penal Code 422.

Hit-and-run, Vehicle Code 2001 et seq.

Murder, Penal Code 187.

**There are two important things to be aware of regarding aggressive drivers:**

1. Recognizing and avoiding the behaviors in yourself.
2. Avoiding other drivers engaging in these behaviors.

Ways to avoid becoming an aggressive driver include:

- Allow plenty of time to reach your destination.
- Do not “cut off” other drivers.
- Do not drive slowly in the left (fast) lane.
- Do not tailgate.
- Do not gesture to other drivers.
- Use your horn for emergencies only.
- Let aggressive drivers pass you.

The following are examples of common behaviors that can lead to aggressive driving and how to avoid them:

- **Lane Blocking**–Don’t block the passing lane. Stay out of the far-left lane if other traffic wants to drive faster, and yield to the right for any vehicle that wants to pass.

- **Tailgating**–Maintain a safe distance from the vehicle in front of you. If you are being tailgated, leave more space between you and the vehicle in front of you.
- **Signal Lights**–Always use your signals when changing lanes and avoid changing lanes too close to the other vehicles. After you have changed lanes, turn your signal off.
- **Gestures**–If you must gesture to another driver, do so in a way that will not be interpreted as hostile or obscene.
- **Horn**–Avoid using your horn to say “hello” to a pedestrian. The driver in front of you might think you are honking at them.
- **Failure to Turn**–Unless otherwise posted, right turns are allowed after a complete stop at a red light. Choosing to wait for the green light may frustrate the drivers behind you but is not illegal.
- **Parking**–Do not take more than one parking space. Do not park in the disabled parking space if you do not have a disabled parking placard or plates.
- **Headlights**–If you use your high-beam headlights, dim your lights for oncoming traffic and when approaching a vehicle from behind; do not retaliate to oncoming high beams with your own.
- **Merging**–When traffic permits, make room to allow vehicles to merge into your lane.

Now that we know how to recognize Aggressive Driving and Road Rage behavior in ourselves, and others here are a few tips to keep yourself safe if you become the victim of an aggressive driver or road rager:

1. Get out of their way and steer clear of them on the road
2. Stay relaxed. Remember that reaching your destination safely and calmly is your goal.
3. Don’t challenge them. Avoid eye contact. Ignore rude gestures and refuse to return them.
4. Give them the benefit of the doubt. Not all aggressive driving behavior is directed at you.
5. Don’t block the passing lane, especially if you are driving slower than most of the traffic. Move to the right lane.

6. Dial 911 on a cell phone to report aggressive drivers or call your local police when you can.

## **8.2 Keeping Your Own Emotions in Check**

Getting into an argument with another driver on the road can get pretty heated. These arguments can even lead to the death of one or more persons involved, even innocent bystanders! Here are a few useful tips for keeping your emotions in check when behind the wheel:

**Take back control.** If you control your thoughts, you'll be able to control your emotions. Keep your mind on pleasant thoughts. Think back to pleasant moments during your last vacation. Or remember how delicious last night's dinner was. As you concentrate on pleasant moments you'll find yourself calming down.

**Breathe deep.** Taking slow, deep breaths is a simple way to relax and soothe racing thoughts.

**Use your ears.** While it can be useful to keep up with the news while you're commuting to work or running errands, be aware of how you feel when the news turns negative. Does it bring on feelings of stress or frustration? You might want to switch to some music that has a soothing effect on your thoughts and emotions. So don't be afraid to turn off stressful news, or to put away the heavy metal rock, and get out some cheerful tunes.

**Wait.** Although your problem is weighing on your mind, the reality is that you most likely won't solve it while driving. Wait until you get out from behind the wheel to work a problem out.

**Sleep.** Of course, not while you're driving. However, if you get a good night's rest, you will be more alert and more capable of dealing with the emotions that come up during the day. That will have a direct effect on your driving since when you get behind the wheel you'll be in a better frame of mind.

**Plan.** Are you frequently frustrated because of unexpected delays on the road? Plan on leaving a bit early, so that, when you hit the delay, you can keep your calm and still arrive on time. Planning ahead may also help you choose the best route with the fewest delays and reduce unnecessary stress.

**Stop.** If you truly can't calm down, it may be better to pull over at a gas station or other convenient stopping place and resume driving only after your emotions have settled down.

Unfortunately, millions of drivers exhibit some form of aggressive driving daily. Therefore, keeping your emotions in check will definitely be a daily practice when driving! According to

a survey by AAA Foundations Annual Traffic Safety Culture Index, millions of drivers engaged in the following angry and aggressive behaviors in the 30 days before the survey, including:

1. **Aggressive driving by switching lanes quickly/or very close behind another car:** 26 percent (57 million drivers)
2. **Made rude gestures or honked at other drivers:** 32 percent (71 million drivers)
3. **Driven 15 mph over the speed limit on a freeway:** 48 percent (106 million drivers)
4. **Driven through a red light:** 31 percent (68 million drivers)
5. **Passed in front of a vehicle at less than a car length:** 22 percent (49 million drivers)
6. **Speeded up when another vehicle tried to overtake you:** 25 percent (55 million drivers)
7. **Followed vehicle in front of you closely to prevent another vehicle from merging in front of you:** 34 percent (75 million drivers)
8. **Merged into traffic even when another driver tries to close the gap between vehicles:** 28 percent (62 million drivers)

**Psychologists are studying what makes some people more prone to road rage** and how to keep them from becoming a danger on the road. Research suggests that young males are the most likely to perpetrate road rage. Environmental factors such as crowded roads can boost anger behind the wheel. Certain psychological factors, including displaced anger and high life stress, are also linked to road rage. In addition, studies have found that people who experience road rage are more likely to misuse alcohol and drugs.

### **Road Rage Quiz**

Are you an aggressive driver? Over time we develop certain driving behaviors that may seem ok to us, but in actuality they may not be ok and might be interpreted by others as “road rage”. We cannot control what others think.

Check the following behaviors you have caught yourself doing at least twice. Hopefully, after taking this time to assess your driving behavior you will become more aware of how you perform when behind the wheel. This information is just for you. As you become more aware, it may lead to becoming a more defensive driver. As we’ve seen in chapter 6, Defensive Driving, a defensive driver is a prepared driver - one who is prepared for various road conditions, traffic conditions, any potential hazards, etc.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Mentally condemn other drivers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Belittle other drivers to passengers in your car.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Close the space between you and the car in front of you so another car can't merge.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Give another driver a "dirty" look.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Prevent another driver from passing you or speed past another car in protest.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tailgate to pressure another driver to go faster or get out of your way.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Think or fantasize violence against another driver.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Honk, yell or make obscene gestures at other drivers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Use your car to threaten or intimidate others by making sudden moves.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Chase down another car because of an insult or infraction.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Get out of the car and yell at another driver.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Deliberately bump or ram another car in anger.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Try to run another car off the road.