

# Aggressive Driving Fact Sheet

HS02-007D (07-20)

**T**wo terms – **aggressive driving** and **road rage** – emerged during the 1990s when a series of news reports about separate traffic disputes captured the public's attention: a Massachusetts bookkeeper murders a motorist with a single shot from a crossbow; a Mississippi homemaker runs a woman off the road to her death; two Virginia men in an angry, on-the-road duel crash into oncoming traffic killing three drivers; a North Carolina driving instructor tells his student to chase a vehicle that cut them off and subsequently punches the offending driver; and a New Mexico high school athlete is shot to death over a stop sign right-of-way dispute, quickly leading to two more local "road rage" fatalities.<sup>1</sup> Fatal car crashes and driver encounters linked to "an increase in aggressive driving...and a sharp decline in civility and respect for other motorists and traffic laws"<sup>2</sup> increased by 51% between



1990 and 1996.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, road rage continues to rise. Fatal car crashes related to aggressive driving climbed nearly 500% from 80 in 2006 to 467 in 2015.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, incidents of drivers waving or firing a gun at another driver or passenger rose from 247 in 2014 to 620 in 2016.<sup>5</sup> [The Trace](#), a non-profit news agency funded by Everytown for Gun Safety, reports that in the first six

months of 2017, nearly two gun-related road-rage incidents occurred each day.

Approximately 80% of polled drivers express serious aggression, anger, or road rage at least once a year.<sup>6</sup> This alarming figure illustrates why it is important to recognize the causes and avoid the behaviors that lead to aggressive driving and dangerous road rage encounters.

<sup>1</sup> National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Study of Programs Implemented to Reduce the Incidence of Aggressive Driving. Website. <https://one.nhtsa.gov/people/injury/research/aggdrivingenfp/pages/Introduction.html>. Accessed July 17, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of Transportation National Transportation Library. Aggressive Driving. Website. <https://rosap.ntl.bts.gov/view/dot/40587>. Accessed July 22, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Mizel, L. Aggressive Driving. Aggressive Driving: Three Studies. AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, Washington, DC, March 1997. Webpage. [https://dot.cdc.gov/view/dot/40587/dot\\_40587\\_DS1.pdf](https://dot.cdc.gov/view/dot/40587/dot_40587_DS1.pdf). Accessed July 17, 2020

<sup>4</sup> Psychology Today. The Road to Rage. Website. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-human-equation/201803/the-road-rage>. Accessed July 22, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> The Trace. More People are Pulling Guns During Road-Rage Incidents. Webpage. <https://www.thetrace.org/2017/08/guns-road-rage-cleveland-2017/>. Accessed July 17, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> AAA NewsRoom. Nearly 80 Percent of Drivers Express Significant Anger, Aggression or Road Rage. Website. <https://newsroom.aaa.com/2016/07/nearly-80-percent-of-drivers-express-significant-anger-aggression-or-road-rage/>. Accessed July 15, 2020.

## Aggressive Driving and Road Rage

**Aggressive driving** is any unsafe behavior performed purposely with ill intent or disregard for safety that puts other drivers or property at risk. It is a moving violation subject to fines or jail time. Examples of aggressive driving include:

- speeding in heavy traffic;
- tailgating;
- cutting in front of another driver, then slowing down;
- running red lights or stop signs;
- weaving in and out of traffic;
- changing lanes without signaling;
- blocking cars attempting to pass or change lanes; or
- passing a vehicle on the wrong side of the road.

Extreme cases of aggressive driving escalate to **road rage**, which can end in violence. Road rage behaviors (other than shouting or inappropriate gesturing) is a criminal offense. Examples of road rage include any of the following behaviors:

- cursing or making rude or obscene gestures at other drivers;
- throwing objects at another vehicle;
- ramming or sideswiping a vehicle;
- forcing a driver off the road; or
- physically assaulting a driver.

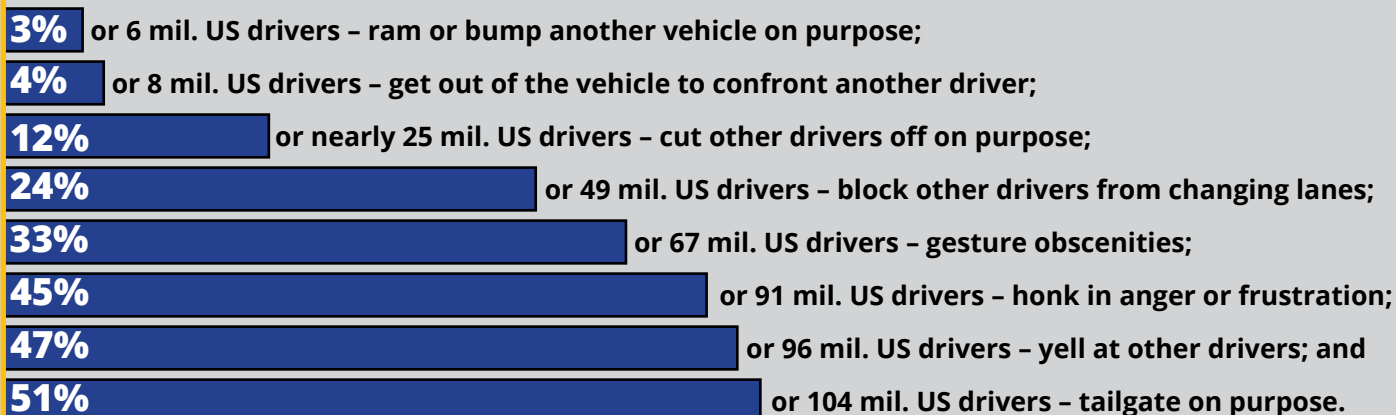
## Angry Drivers

The regular pressure of everyday life – work, relationships, time constraints, and finances -- can take a toll on people, even those with normally good anger management skills. Add the stress of driving on a busy road, and sometimes a situation as simple as a vehicle traveling under the posted speed limit can trigger aggressive driving.

Driving is dangerous, and because it is dangerous, it creates tension. Drivers' heart rates often increase, and muscles tighten. Stress makes drivers primed for feeling strong emotions, like anger, when provoked.

Not surprisingly, a [2003 study](#) found that aggressive drivers react more impulsively, get angry more often, and express feelings more aggressively. These drivers also tend to speed, tailgate, switch lanes quickly, and have more

***In a 2016 survey of drivers, the [American Automobile Association's Foundation for Traffic Safety reports:](#)***



accidents, yet they are more judgmental of other people's driving behaviors.<sup>7</sup>

Anger-fueled behavior, combined with the power, privacy, and perceived security that the inside of a vehicle can provide, leads many otherwise-rational drivers to make impulsive, dangerous decisions on the road. Also, since most drivers are unknown to each other, it makes it easier for angry drivers to label [anonymous offenders](#) negatively and make assumptions about their character and motivations.



## Avoid Confrontation

Remaining calm and courteous behind the wheel of a vehicle lowers a driver's risk of an unpleasant confrontation or negative driving encounter.

- **Avoid eye contact.** Eye contact with aggressive drivers increases the chance of confrontation. Steer clear and ignore angry drivers, when possible. Keep the encounter as impersonal as possible.
- **Do not respond to aggression with aggression.** Traffic problems and drivers' behaviors are not a personal challenge or an affront. Avoid becoming reactive. Get out of the other drivers' way as soon as safely possible.
- **Be tolerant and forgiving.** Another driver may be having a really bad day. Always assume their behavior is not personal.
- **Report aggressive drivers by calling 311.** If necessary, police departments invite motorists to report unsafe drivers by calling 311. Include the vehicle description, location, license plate number, and direction of travel to authorities, if possible.
- **Call 911 if threatened.** Anytime a motorist is concerned for their safety, contact emergency services at 911. Continue to drive to a public place, such as a police station, hospital, or fire station, if possible.

While drivers have no control over others on the road, they can control their behaviors and reactions to circumstances around them. Staying alert, remaining calm, and obeying the rules of the road can help decrease aggressive driving and avoid the dangers of road rage.

<sup>7</sup> Deffenbacher JL, Deffenbacher DM, Lynch RS, Richards TL. Anger, aggression, and risky behavior: a comparison of high and low anger drivers. *Behavior Research and Therapy*. 2003;41(6):701-718. doi:10.1016/s0005-7967(02)00046-3. Website. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0005796702000463?via%3Dihub>. Accessed July 21, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Speeding. Website. <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/speeding>. Accessed July 22, 2020.

## Avoid Actions that Provoke Others

1

### ***Avoid tailgating.***

Give other drivers room on the road. Leave at least a two-second cushion between vehicles to provide enough room to stop in an emergency and to give other drivers room to change lanes, if needed. Pick a fixed spot on the side of the road, and when the vehicle in front passes the mark, count for two seconds. If your vehicle passes the same spot before the count of two, increase the distance between the vehicles.

2

### ***Never drive in the passing lane.***

The left lane of multi-lane roadways is the passing lane for use when passing another vehicle. After passing a vehicle, move back into a driving lane when both headlights of the passed vehicle are visible in the rearview mirror.

3

### ***Let drivers pass.***

Avoid obstructing the flow of traffic even when going the speed limit. Always allow faster traffic to pass. Never challenge an aggressive driver by speeding up, slowing down, or attempting to hold the same position. Avoid causing another driver to change their speed or direction. Never force a driver to use their brakes or turn their steering wheel.

4

### ***Use turn signals appropriately.***

Use turn signals when merging, changing lanes, or turning. Check blind spots before merging or switching lanes to ensure other drivers are not cut off.

5

### ***Do not speed.***

Speeding increases the chances of a driver losing control of a vehicle. It is a contributing factor in more than one-quarter of all traffic fatalities.<sup>8</sup>

6

### ***Use the horn and headlight high beams responsibly.***

Tap the horn only when needed but avoid the long blasts and accompanying hand gestures. On an expressway, two brief flashes of high beams are acceptable to request a slow driver in a passing lane to move. Do not use repeated high beam flashes or use steady high beams to make a slow vehicle move or go faster. When driving at night, dim headlights when approaching head-on traffic.

7

### ***Let drivers merge.***

Whether merging or yielding the right of way, drive courteously to avoid a confrontation. When in doubt let, the other vehicle go first.

8

### ***Consider others in parking lots.***

Park in one spot, not across multiple spaces. Take care not to hit cars with the vehicle's door or with nearby shopping carts.



*Safety Violations Hotline*  
**1-800-452-9595**  
[safetyhotline@tdi.texas.gov](mailto:safetyhotline@tdi.texas.gov)

The Texas Department of Insurance,  
Division of Workers' Compensation (DWC)  
E-mail [resourcecenter@tdi.texas.gov](mailto:resourcecenter@tdi.texas.gov)  
or call 1-800-687-7080 for more information.

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