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## What is Up With Aggressive Drivers?

At one time, driving just got us from Point A to Point B. In recent years, however, it has evolved into a competitive, and at times, combative, quest on our nation's roads. The phenomenon of aggressive driving, or road rage, unfortunately, is rising.

### What Is Road Rage?

Road rage typically occurs when a single incident between drivers escalates, and turns into a belligerent exchange. Situations of aggressive driving range from obscene gestures and insults to violence and murder. Guns, other weapons, and even vehicles are used to cause injury in the more severe cases.

The American Automobile Association reports that in the U.S. incidents of road rage have risen by 51 percent since 1990. Frustration and anger are part of life, so why has acting on these emotions while driving become common? Road conditions have changed over the years. Congested roadways are the norm since employment opportunities extend beyond metropolitan areas. Roads in the suburbs were not designed for the current volume, resulting in frequent congestion and frustrated drivers.

Further, traffic has increased since the 1970s when women in the workforce who own their own cars became more common. The design of cars themselves may also contribute to the problem. Modern vehicles are larger, well insulated and have essentially become mobile living spaces. The vehicles with which we share the roads are viewed as obstacles rather than machines carrying other people.

There is no one group largely responsible for the occurrence of road rage. Perpetrators span a variety of demographics. The condition under which it occurs is somewhat ironic, however. Road rage is more likely to happen just prior to gridlock, when volume is high but traffic is still moving.

### What Sets Off Road Rage?

There is no way to predict how a driver will react to a given situation. Some behaviors commonly met with road rage include:

- Tailgating
- Turning without use of signal light
- Driving below the speed limit
- Cutting off vehicles when switching lanes
- Blocking a lane by dropping off or picking up passengers
- Frequent braking

### Dealing with Aggressive Drivers

Like a schoolyard bully, the best way to deal with aggressive drivers is to choose not to engage. If a driver behaves combatively, give them ample room and do not make eye contact. Trying to 'get even' or 'teach a lesson' to rude drivers is more likely to escalate the conflict, and is rarely worth it.

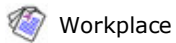
If an aggressive driver follows you, do not head home. It is safer, instead, to go to a well-populated area, such as a store parking lot, where you can attract the attention of others. If you fear you are in danger, actively seek help.

### Keeping Your Cool

The only control any of us really have is in how we choose to react to the world around us. To avoid road rage, choose to

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avoid creating situations where your temper overcomes good judgment. Some tips to keep your temper in check include:

- Allow ample traveling time
- Play relaxing or no music
- Avoid driving when angry or stressed
- Be aware of construction projects that could affect your commute



If you feel yourself losing control, the best course of action is to pull off the road to get perspective.

It's impossible to gauge the mood of others. To stay safe on the road, never underestimate your fellow commuters. By remembering we all have places to go and swapping our aggressions with some flexibility, it is possible to reverse current trends, making the roadways a bit safer.

-- *Catie Hayes*

**Related Links:**

- [Interactive Road Rage Test](#)
- [RoadRagers.com -- Advice](#)