

Road Rage

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With the steadily rising thermometers across the metro area, I've noticed that tempers are also flaring. One of my personal litmus tests of rising tempers is the amount of road rage that I witness. This past week, on my commute to work, I saw the driver of a car, covered with peace-inspiring bumper stickers, use a hand signal that was not very peaceful toward another driver.

As I started looking into the phenomenon of "road rage," I realized that it is becoming a more and more serious issue. With the multitasking that has become a part of every day life in our society, it seems there are an increasing number of distractions on the roads, and all of these can lead to increasingly dangerous interactions amongst motorists. In light of my findings about road rage, I've collected the following suggestions to help deal with it before, during, and after it occurs:

- Always give yourself extra time when you are travelling under time constraints, such as those related to work hours, interviews, or important meetings. We are more likely to make impulsive driving decisions during times of additional stress. Ensuring that there is extra time to get to our destination can eliminate the stress and the additional risk of

becoming an agent of road rage. Knowing ahead of time that you might be travelling during rush hour can also indicate a need for increased time allotment.

- Related to the first suggestion, it is essential that we take care of basic needs before getting on the road. Being overly tired, hungry, or needing to meet the call of nature can all contribute to the average human being's tolerance for stress (i.e., when basic needs are not met, the possibility of "snapping" increases).
- When you are driving and are confronted with another driver's road rage, remember to remain calm. Any reaction of anger has the capacity of feeding the other motorist's rage. Take a few deep breaths and concentrate on the road ahead of you, while remaining especially alert for erratic driving. It never hurts to slow down. Remember, if a person seems to be rageful toward you and begins to follow you, do not lead them to your home. Instead, pull into a safe well-lit public place (a police department parking lot is optimal) and remain in your locked vehicle while you call the authorities.
- Listening to local radio stations before and during rush hour can help you avoid traffic jams. Typically, the more traffic is congested, the more those areas pose a risk of road-rage incidents. Avoiding high-traffic areas is always a good idea, when possible.
- Report any potentially dangerous incidents of road rage to the authorities. Remember as much identifying information about the vehicle, and phone the local police department after you have arrived at your destination. In doing so, you may be preventing someone from being seriously hurt.

- When in doubt, pull over to the far shoulder. And if it's you that is angry, pull over at a safe distance from traffic and take a breather before rejoining traffic.

Road rage can spread like a wildfire. Be sure that you are in control of your own stress as much as possible before getting on the road. Decrease distractions, which can cause dangerous conditions on the road. And if you are prone to severe anger outbursts when driving, seek professional assistance. When episodes of road rage occur consistently, they are often an indicator of larger underlying problems.

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ADMHN is a private, nonprofit 501 © (3) corporation providing professional, comprehensive behavioral health care and substance abuse treatment primarily, but not exclusively, in Arapahoe and Douglas counties. We offer programs for adults, seniors, families, couples and children. These services include counseling, psychiatry, crisis services, case management, substance abuse treatment, victim services, an adult acute treatment unit, adult supported and residential housing, services to the criminal justice system, vocational and social rehabilitation, a day treatment therapeutic school and school-based services. Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network has an on-site pharmacy. We offer community education, wellness programs and a Speakers Bureau. Learn more at admhn.org.

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