

Aggressive driving behaviour is becoming more and more prevalent in Australia, with reports of road rage assaults increasing dramatically over the past few years.

Driving while in an emotionally agitated state greatly increases the risk of being involved in an incident, both for the perpetrators and the victims of road rage.

Causes of road rage:

The causes of road rage and aggressive driving are complex. Those who are more aggressive in their everyday lives are more likely to be aggressive when driving a vehicle. Other factors, such as emotional state and stress can heavily contribute to the experience of road rage.

- ▼ Human factors such as age, gender, beliefs or mood. With males and younger drivers being more aggressive.
- ▼ Contextual stressors can contribute to a heightened emotional state which can lead to aggressive driving behaviour and a heightened incident risk. Contextual stressors can include heavy traffic, time pressures, road works, or high temperatures.
- ▼ Interpretations of the incident: for example, personalising, catastrophising, and overgeneralising.
- ▼ Traffic violations or discourteous driving by other drivers. Many small infractions by different individual drivers can be compounded and directed at a later individual.
- ▼ The anonymity we feel in the car. There is less pressure to abide by social norms while we are in a motor vehicle.
- ▼ The illusion of control. This refers to the belief that the driver has an above average degree of control over their situation, perhaps due to superior (real or imagined) driving ability or skill.
- ▼ Inability to communicate in another way.¹

Top 10 driver frustrations:

- ▼ others using their phone while driving
- ▼ tailgating
- ▼ speeding up when trying to overtake
- ▼ throwing litter from the car
- ▼ failing to indicate
- ▼ discourteous driving
- ▼ incorrect use of parking spaces
- ▼ turning from wrong lanes
- ▼ hogging a lane
- ▼ speeding in restricted zones².

How to avoid road rage in yourself:

- ▼ Watch out for the illusion of control. Remember that 80% of drivers' think their skill is above average – a statistical impossibility.
- ▼ Avoid blame and punishment, and be forgiving. Remember that negative events do happen, and all people make mistakes.
- ▼ Consider other drivers might not be malicious and their behaviour is not necessarily one of aggression.
- ▼ Slow down, breathe, and speak to yourself in a calm, reassuring voice. This will help reduce the physiological response to anger.
- ▼ Focus your attention on safe and calm driving. Remember that the most important thing is that you arrive at your destination safely.³

How to avoid road rage in others:

If you become the victim of a road rage incident, the most important thing to remember is to stay calm. Do not retaliate or react to the other driver, as this will only cause the situation to escalate. Remember that the other driver is stressed and in a heightened emotional state. Avoid making eye contact, and continue to focus on safe and calm driving.⁴

Minor acts of rage

- Shouting abuse.
- Making obscene gestures.
- Flicking lights on and off to get other drivers to move out of the way.
- Deliberately braking or slowing suddenly to irritate or impede others.
- Giving a prolonged blast of the horn deliberately.
- Driving too closely behind another vehicle (tailgating).
- Pursuing another vehicle.
- Deliberately swerving in front of another vehicle.
- Trying to run another vehicle off the road.
- Attempting to stop another vehicle.
- Deliberately bumping another vehicle.
- Getting out and approaching another road user.
- Damaging or attempting to damage a vehicle.
- Assaulting or attempting to assault another road user (i.e. pedestrians, cyclists and other drivers).⁵

Severe acts of rage

References

1. Nrspp.org.au. (2018). NRSPP Australia NRSPP Quick Fact: Road Rage., viewed 27/08/2018 <<https://www.nrspp.org.au/resources/nrspp-quick-fact-road-rage>>
2. Afma.net.au. (2018). Road Rage. viewed 27/09/2018 <https://afma.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Road-Rage_QuickFact_V4.pdf>
3. ibid.
4. ABC News. (2018). Road rage study launched into why mildmannered people flip out, viewed 27/08/2018 <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-07-12/road-rage-surveyuniversity-of-queensland/7622238>>
5. ibid.

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