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Road Rage

Aggressive driving, commonly referred to as "Road Rage," is a new arrival on the public agenda, but its roots parallel the proliferation of the automobile.

Pressures derived from employment or school, meeting the needs of our loved ones, a crowded driving environment, and declining time for personal interests and relaxation all contribute to rising stress in our modern world. More and more often, these pressures are turning to anger on our nation's roadways.

Any driver can become possessed because of the accumulation of stress and frustration. You must learn to control your emotions to avoid becoming an aggressive driver. At the same time, you must develop strategies for coping with others who do not control their anger.



AFTER COMPLETING THIS CHAPTER, THE STUDENT MUST BE ABLE TO LIST AND TO IDENTIFY :

- the dangers of aggressive driving.
- the characteristics of an aggressive driver.
- the common errors made by aggressive drivers.
- the strategies for responding to aggressive drivers.



A Major Concern

The **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)** suggests that one third of three million injury crashes and two thirds of the resulting fatalities can be attributed directly to aggressive driving or road rage.

Realize that you are at risk from these

aggressive drivers. Recent studies (the NHTSA study quoted above is only one example of many) show that thousands are reported injured or killed in North America every year due to confrontations based on road rage or with aggressive drivers.

Do not underestimate the potential for



violence. Millions of drivers are armed with weapons (firearms, knives, clubs, etc.), and every driver is armed with a much more lethal weapon, their vehicle. Anyone, old or young, male or female, rich or poor, from any racial background, can become an aggressive driver and attack you. A highly stressed, angry driver is capable of incredible acts of violence, including assault and murder.

CAUSES

The Highway Transportation System is more congested than it has ever been. Despite massive construction of new roads to alleviate rush hour traffic jams, the volume of new vehicles that are manufactured and then licensed every year, exceeds the new space that has been created for existing road users. Chronic traffic congestion is the Texas commuter's biggest headache. The scenario of sitting in rush hour traffic jams for extended periods of time creates stress.

In general, people today have more stress in their lives than was common a decade ago. Whether from pressure to succeed (on the job or in the classroom) or from personal obligations (to friends and family), psychologists identify rising stress as a major factor in the many problems facing society. They have also identified an increasing disrespect for others and attitudes that condone hostility as major factors in aggressive driver behavior.

People are always rushing to get somewhere (meetings, appointments, sports or cultural activities, etc.). They tend to depart with barely enough time to reach their destination, hoping to make up time while driving; their driving

becomes more aggressive in a futile attempt not to be late. This type of behavior creates more stress.

Most drivers **consider their vehicle a prized and symbolic possession**. It is part of their self-image. Any perceived slight to their vehicle is taken as a personal affront. With the increased driver interactions required in the congested HTS, they feel that they are being insulted on a regular basis. This creates more stress.

In recent years, the incidence of, or at least the **reporting of, aggressive driving behavior has become more common**. When we see other motorists acting in this manner, most drivers respond by picking up on the behavior and responding with similar actions. Anger and aggressive driving can be energizing, even exhilarating. The action of venting anger normally escalates the response to a higher level. Aggressive thoughts occurring in sequence provoke greater intensity of anger. Continued escalation can lead to unreasonable violence, oblivious to any consequences.

Strong emotions can interfere with your ability to think and reason. Anger can affect your alertness, concentration and decision-making, all aspects central to your safety behind the wheel.

When all of these factors interact, as they do in the HTS every day, the impact on motorists is self-evident. Road rage and the conflicts between road users has become a cause of major concern. Many states have enacted laws applying more severe penalties for drivers convicted of road rage behaviors. You must develop a strategy to deal with this problem.

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SAFETY TIPS

An aggressive driver will intentionally aggravate other drivers and, in some cases, will cause bodily injury, property damage, and death. You must not respond to these provocations; it will only make matters worse. **It takes two to tangle!**



Types of Aggressive Drivers

When traffic safety experts and psychologists examined the road rage phenomenon, they identified several aggressive driving behaviors that lead to these conflicts.

Many of the early symptoms, which are suggested to contribute to the problem, are common to many drivers who have never been involved in a road rage incident in their lives. If they do not change their driving behavior, they are considered prime candidates for future incidents.



the turning or stopping variety) are used to let others know they are upset.

QUIET ROAD RAGE

The first level of road rage behavior, which is common to many road users, involves continually complaining about the conduct of other motorists, always rushing to get to a destination, treating driving as a competitive activity (trying to beat the other drivers), and actively resisting the attempts of other road users to maneuver. These types of behavior do not create conflicts of themselves; however, they are the building blocks for confrontations between road users. Though other road users may not notice them immediately, ergo the name quiet road rage, they produce the environment in which aggression can easily escalate.

The aggression or anger is communicated to other road users. It has escalated to a personal confrontation. At the extreme, drivers have been known to pull over, exit their vehicles, and proceed to have a verbal argument at the side of the roadway. How easily could this situation escalate further? Can physical assault be far away? Is violence inevitable?

EPIC ROAD RAGE

A wide variety of behavior is included in this level of road rage. Most of them involve drivers using their vehicle to frighten or to attack other road users (as a weapon), or using an actual weapon.

VERBAL ROAD RAGE

In the second level of aggressive driving behavior, drivers verbalize or exhibit their frustrations and anger. They yell, curse, and honk (a long blast of the horn) at other road users. Often, they will deliberately pull alongside another motorist and glare at him/her. Angry gestures and hand signals (not

They cut off another motorist. They drive in front of others, deliberately slam on the brakes to get even or to scare, and then block their path of travel. Two motorists chase each other for several miles, waving and cursing at each other. A motorist rams his/her vehicle into another vehicle, or into a building where the victim is located. An enraged driver exits his/her vehicle and smashes the other's windshield.



Two drivers arguing at the side of the road end up in fisticuffs, or worse, use weapons, which they keep concealed under the driver's seat, to attack one another. A motorist pulls out a firearm and shoots another road user.

All of the above-mentioned scenarios are examples of epic road rage that have occurred in the United States in recent years. It is for these reasons that road rage has become a matter of major social concern.



SAFETY TIPS



As with all aspects of driving, you cannot control the environment or other road users. You do, however, have control of yourself and your actions. This is where you must start to protect yourself from possible road rage involvement. You must control your emotions and avoid offending other motorists. Correct any bad habits that may infuriate others who are already over-aggressive or angry!

14-C

Driving Errors

Traffic safety experts and psychologists suggest that you should follow the rules of the road and be polite and courteous to others. Furthermore, you should correct any unsafe driving habits that are likely to antagonize or to infuriate other road users and may lead to a road rage confrontation.

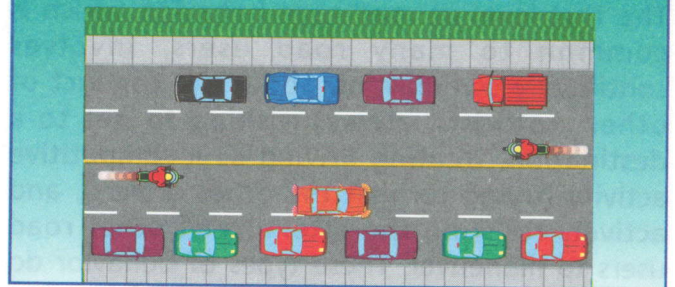
Among the identified behaviors that have resulted in violence in the past are:

LANE BLOCKING

Remember, the passing lane is for faster moving traffic. Stay out of the passing lane as much as possible. If you are in the left lane and the driver behind wants to pass, move over and let him/her pass. If he/she is speeding, it is better that they are unhappy with a citation rather than angry at you.

Never block the roadway or a lane in order to ask for directions or to talk to a pedestrian or other road user for any reason whatsoever. Pull over and park out of the traffic flow before conversing.

DON'T DOUBLE PARK



Don't double park (stop beside the vehicles parked near the curb) while you, or your passenger, runs into a store to pick something up. Find a parking space and move your vehicle out of the traffic flow before running that important, quick errand. Be considerate, don't block the flow of traffic.

If you are towing a trailer (or driving slowly) and traffic builds up behind you, pull over (onto the shoulder, if necessary), and allow the vehicles behind you to pass before proceeding on your way.

If you find yourself in a turning lane, don't block the path of other drivers waiting to turn.



When the traffic signal indicates protected turns may proceed, turn even though you had not intended to do so. Never block the lane by waiting for another signal.

INVADING SPACE

Other road users feel threatened when a driver cuts in too close or occupies their space cushion (putting them at risk). You react in the same way when someone else invades your space.



Don't tailgate. You must always maintain a safe and reasonable following distance. At freeway speeds, a minimum of 3 seconds in ideal driving conditions, more in bad weather or heavy traffic.

When preparing to pass another vehicle, don't get too close to the vehicle ahead. If you do, you will lose your speed superiority, block your field of vision, and moreover, you risk aggravating the driver ahead.

When completing the passing maneuver, don't cut back into the right lane too soon. Make sure the whole front of the vehicle is visible in your rear-view mirror before returning to the right lane. Also, do not slow down after entering the lane; it is infuriating to have to slow down because someone passed you. Maintain speed until you have a comfortable space behind you.

In merging situations, leave plenty of space between your vehicle and other motorists. When another driver is merging into traffic, cooperate and change lanes, if possible, or adjust speed to create a gap.

When changing lanes, don't cut in too close. Do not weave back and forth, from lane to

lane, performing several lane changes one after another. Both of these actions cause an angry reaction from other road users. Switch lanes only when necessary and always follow the correct procedures.

COMMUNICATION ERRORS

Communication is one of the keys of the safe and cooperative use of the HTS. Failure to communicate, improper communication, or communicating aggressive attitudes have all created confrontational situations.

The most common aggravation is **failure to signal your intentions**. Always signal your intentions early, without confusing other road users; it is required by law (for the last 100 feet prior to a maneuver) and essential to reduce risk.

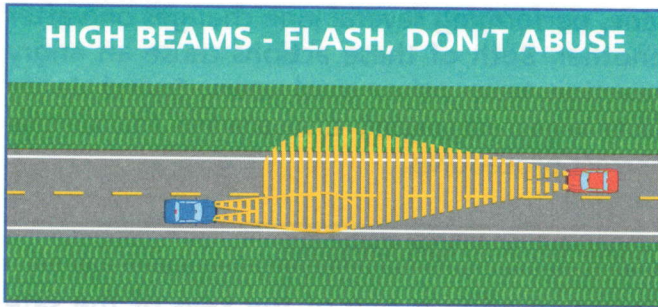
On some turns and all lane changes, you don't turn the steering wheel sufficiently for the turn signal automatic cancel device to function. Driving along with a turn signal flashing is both confusing and aggravating to other motorists. Remember to **check the turn signal** after completing a maneuver and/or use the lane changer device for lane changes.



When meeting an oncoming vehicle or when approaching close to a vehicle ahead, driving with the high beams creates a blinding glare for the other motorist. Remember to dim to the low beams, as it is required by law and will reduce the risk of a collision, as well as a potential confrontation.

When faced with high beams from another motorist, resist the impulse to get even or to teach a lesson. Flash your high beams once,





and then look far ahead towards the right edge of the roadway (oncoming), or change the rear-view mirror to the night setting (vehicle behind). Then ignore the discourtesy and continue driving. He/she, who drives away, lives to drive another day.

Flashing the high beams repeatedly, whether to signal the driver to move over or to advise of high beams, is very irritating. Use this very effective communication tool sparingly; one or two quick flashes will suffice. If the other road user does not get the message, forget it and don't get aggravated.

Honking the horn is another excellent communication device that must also be used in moderation. Use two short taps (not a continuous blaring sound which is very offensive) and only when necessary. Never use the horn as a means of attracting people's attention for reasons other than road safety.

Honking the horn as soon as a light changes to green has caused scores of violent incidents. Avoid this aggressive habit; instead, be patient for several seconds. While waiting at a red light, pay attention, check cross traffic, and you'll be ready to move when it changes.

Using gestures to yield the right-of-way to another road user is an excellent form of



communication at a four-way stop. However, demonstrating your emotions by shaking a fist, giving someone the "bird" (middle finger), or even shaking your head is a definite No! No! Motorists have been beaten, stabbed, and shot for this type of communication.

OTHER AREAS OF CONCERN

When parking, make sure you park using ONE space; do not encroach on the other spaces. Never use the spaces reserved for the disabled (unless you are entitled and can display the necessary placard). Avoid making any contact with other vehicles when you open the door of your vehicle in a parking lot, or while entering or exiting a parking space. A little bump against the bumper of another vehicle could result in a much bigger bump on your head by an angry owner.

Never fight over a parking space, or cut someone off who is waiting to enter a parking space. Let the other motorist have it if the situation arises. A parking space is not worth risking your life.

Cell phones

If you own a cellular phone, don't let the phone distract you while driving. Cell phone users are perceived as careless drivers and a hazard by the general public. Any error on your part while using a cellular phone may elicit a violently unprecedented reaction from some road users.

Have your cell phone equipped with hands-free, speed dialing, and voice recognition options to



reduce the possible distraction. Ideally, stop your vehicle in a safe place before using your cell phone. **Drivers under the age of 18 are prohibited by Texas law from using wireless communications devices.**

Car alarms

If your vehicle is equipped with a car alarm (an excellent idea to reduce the risk of car theft), you should know how to turn it off. Preferably, purchase one that shuts off automatically after a short period of time. If the alarm goes off at the slightest provocation, have it adjusted so that it does not sound unnecessarily.

SAFETY TIPS



Correct unsafe driving habits that may antagonize or infuriate other road users. Follow the rules of the road. Be polite and courteous to other road users. Give the other motorist the benefit of the doubt. Nobody is perfect.



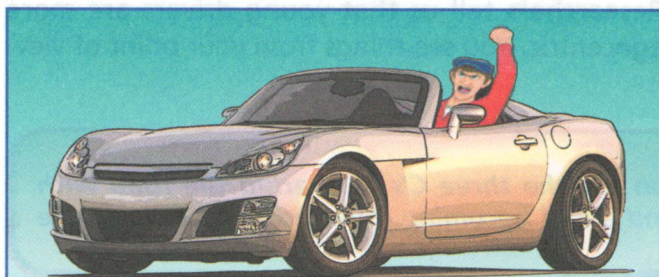
Anger Management

Strong emotions can interfere with your ability to think and reason. Anger is a prime example. It can also affect your alertness, concentration, and decision-making; all of which are aspects that are vital to your safety behind the wheel.

You need to devise a plan of action that will maintain your self-control when you are driving. You cannot control the environment or other road users; but you can learn to control your reactions to it.

STEP ONE

You must acknowledge the fact that you can



Bumper stickers

Bumper stickers, flags, and slogans are common on many vehicles. You should refrain from attaching any to your vehicle that other road users may find offensive. Though you may think that they are funny, they could cause a confrontation with other road users who do not have the same sense of humor as you do.

In the cosmopolitan Texas environment, it is too easy for someone to find something offensive. Be sensitive to others.

feel anger and frustration. A bad or stressful day can create a scenario where your anger can be easily escalated to the point of affecting your ability to drive.

Wind down before you crank up.

When strong emotions take hold, for whatever reason, **postpone driving.**

You should find a way to return to a more normal emotional level before climbing behind the wheel. **If this is not possible, don't drive.** It is irresponsible to drive when you are not in complete control of yourself.

STEP TWO

Pay attention to your thoughts and feelings (anger and frustration) while driving. Realize you cannot control the traffic environment while you are driving; **you can control your reactions to it.** When anger increases to the point that rational behavior is no longer possible, hostile behavior will be the result.



SAFETY TIPS

Learn to control your emotions. While driving, look for the preliminary symptoms that warn of your anger and frustration beginning to rise. Apply the strategies that are most effective for controlling this emotion.

Learn to spot the warning signs of stress, fatigue, and anger before the chain reaction occurs. Develop positive coping strategies.

Keep your cool in traffic!

Recognize the absurdity of traffic disputes. You must challenge anger provoking thoughts before the successive waves of anger can compound the problem. Encased in protective metal (your vehicle), don't become aggressive; realize that your vehicle is not bullet-proof, and you will have to get out of it eventually.

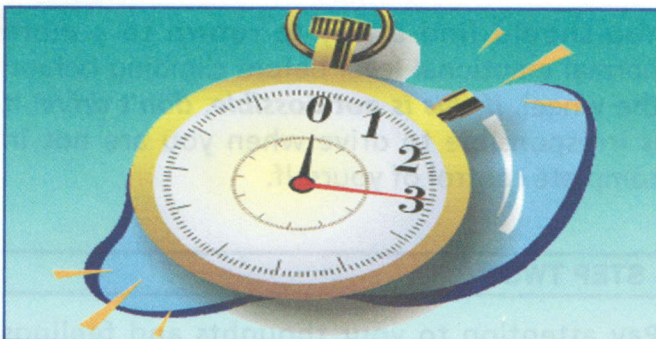
STEP THREE

Change the way you feel gradually, one step at a time. If you have a history of stress or anger, **take a course in anger management.**

Plan your time wisely,

Instead of trying to beat the clock all of the time, plan the trip with extra time in case your vehicle breaks down, or in case of congestion due to a crash, road work, or rush hour traffic. Alter your schedule to avoid rush hour traffic. These adjustments will avoid stress that creates an atmosphere of competition with other motorists.

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**SAFETY TIPS**

Courtesy, communication, and cooperation are the three C's of sharing the road with other road users. Apply these concepts and avoid becoming involved in any road rage incidents with others.

Create a soothing environment in your vehicle.

Play softer, more soothing music (that you like) or some type of audio cassette (ideally dealing with stress). Use the climate and seat controls to improve your comfort zone. Concentrate on relaxing; stretch your arms and legs occasionally.

If you get caught in a traffic jam, don't get angry. Realize the delay is temporary and you'll soon be on your way.

Be courteous.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Courtesy is contagious and may help to diffuse a bad situation. Whether it be leaving a sports event parking lot, or a major tie-up on the freeway, calm and level heads combined with a little courtesy can work wonders. One driver's little courtesy becomes infectious. Other drivers begin to yield even when not required to by law.

A little hand signal to proceed first, combined with a friendly smile, replaces the "dog eat dog" mentality. Drivers smile and become more cooperative than usual. The situation suddenly becomes more livable for everyone concerned.

Courtesy makes order out of chaos.**Give other drivers the benefit of the doubt.**

Don't think that other drivers do things deliberately to antagonize you. You have made mistakes while driving; so can other road users. Try putting yourself in their shoes.

Researchers tell us that young drivers are more egocentric. You see things from your point of view



and you have trouble understanding how the world looks from the point of view of other people. You have to put extra effort into overcoming this problem. **You are not perfect by any means.** How many times have you made the same mistake inadvertently?

So, why should you expect others to be perfect? You should expect that other road users are going to make mistakes from time to time. You must try to avoid a conflict or crash, regardless of whose "error" or "fault" it was. Don't take it personally. Learn from what happened, and proceed on your way.



What To Do When Confronted

The best way to prevent road rage incidents is not to respond in kind. Don't react to any provocation.

You are placing yourself at risk and other road users may take it on themselves to teach you a lesson.

Don't acknowledge the other driver and escalate the situation. Do not up the ante into a personal insult which will provoke righteous indignation and retaliation. **One driver cannot start a fight alone. It takes two to tangle.**

If another motorist pursues you for any reason, **don't go home. Don't stop and get out of your vehicle** to try and resolve the situation. If you have a cell phone, call for help.

Disassociate yourself from problems that occur while you are driving. Keep your distance from drivers who appear to be erratic. **Avoid all conflicts.**

If not, drive to a police station, shopping center, or other popular location where there will be plenty of witnesses or you can get help. **Once there, honk the horn or sound the car alarm to attract attention.**

Don't make eye to eye contact with aggressive or confrontational road users. If challenged by such an individual, swallow your pride, relax, and get out of the way. Take a deep breath. Try being tolerant and forgiving.

When you see an aggressive driver, get the license number and report the incident to the authorities. If the individual is involved in a crash, stop a safe distance from the collision, wait for the police to arrive, and then **report the driver's behavior to the officer.**

As a general rule, lock all doors while driving. Keep the window and/or sunroof only partially open.

When stopped behind a vehicle, leave space so you can pull out and escape if someone approaches your vehicle.

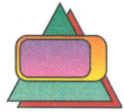
As a rule, **follow the posted speed limits.** When you approach an intersection, avoid accelerating to "run the yellow traffic light."





DRIVING PLAN

The student formulates a Driving Plan incorporating the knowledge and skills of Module Four (Driver Readiness) to endorse, to promote and to sustain lifelong legal and responsible reduced-risk driving practices in the HTS.



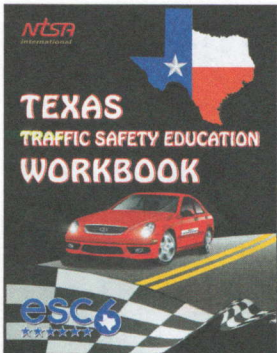
Module Four Review

VOCABULARY - WRITE A SHORT DEFINITION FOR THE FOLLOWING :

- Fatigue
- Chronic illness
- Emotions
- Visual acuity
- Field of vision
- Central vision
- Peripheral vision
- Information overload
- Tunnel vision
- Kinesthetic sense
- Aggressive drivers
- Quiet road rage
- Verbal road rage
- Epic road rage
- Lane blocking
- Invading space
- Communication errors
- Cell phones

TEST A- ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

1. A) How can emotions affect your ability to drive?
B) What are some of the common causes of fatigue?
C) What happens when you are overcome with fatigue?
D) How can you prevent / counteract fatigue?
2. A) What is meant by the name, "Quiet Road Rage?"
B) Describe three behaviors that would be classified as verbal road rage.
C) What differentiates epic road rage incidents from the other types?
D) Identify three epic road rage incidents.
3. A) Name three examples of lane blocking behavior.
B) When passing, what can be done to prevent invading space errors?
C) Identify three communication errors that can cause road rage incidents.
D) When parking, what can be done to avoid offending other motorists?
4. A) When confronted by a road rage incident, what should you do?
B) If you see an aggressive driver, what should you do?



TEXAS TSE STUDENT WORKBOOK

Check your comprehension and mastery of the contents of this Module by completing the corresponding exercises that are found in the complement to the **TEXAS TSE STUDENT MANUAL**:

TEXAS TSE STUDENT WORKBOOK

Complete the assigned questions in the workbook. If necessary, review the chapters when uncertain of an answer and refer to your instructor for further guidance.