

# Campaign for Courtesy on the Road



Making safe, smart  
and courteous driving  
a priority

## Have you ever witnessed

# Road Rage?

You may think incidents of

**Road Rage** or aggressive driving are unusual or exceptional, but they're not. **They occur every day.**

**Campaign for Courtesy on the Road** is about addressing issues and avoiding circumstances that may lead to unsafe driving situations and possibly even tragedy.

Road safety begins with road courtesy. There are many things in life we cannot control. But one thing that we certainly can take command of is ourselves: our **emotions**, our **habits**, our **behavior**. Courtesy is not an old-fashioned word for an outdated notion. It is not just one of life's extras. It is an essential ingredient for a quality life and a crucial component for safety on the road.

In this booklet you will notice that we don't just discuss our behavior as drivers, **but as people**. How we act behind the wheel is a magnification, an intensification of how we conduct ourselves in general.

And how you drive says a lot about who you are.

Scary, huh?

**YAWN.** OK. We know. Yadda yadda yadda. Generalizations are boring. How about stuff you can remember and apply?

Let's start by taking a look at the letters of the word

**C-O-U-R-T-E-S-Y**

and wrap our minds around a few important ideas.

# Cutting people off

Sudden decisions to take an exit off the highway, or last-minute moves to slip into a line of traffic are usually made impulsively and without **warning**. Turn signals are not used, and distances are often too close for comfort—or **safety!** This is **reckless driving**. The driver that has been cut off must **react quickly** to avoid running into the car in front or swerving into another one.

On the physiological level, when you are cut off, a rush of **adrenaline** shoots through your system. Your **heart beats faster**, you **perspire**, your **mouth goes dry**, you feel **fear** or **panic**. Within moments, fear is replaced by **ANGER**. What you do with that anger will determine whether this will be a single unfortunate incident or the beginning of a **domino effect**, where **ANGER** leads to more **ANGER**—a situation that could end in a tragic event. Decide who is in control—you or the person who has just cut you off.

**Do not retaliate** by creeping up onto his bumper, leaning on the horn, or trying to get around him or her to pass. It's not time to roll down your window and give him or her a piece of your mind.

It's not the time to “pay it forward,” passing that **ANGER** on to others. **Get smart!** Collect yourself. Decide that what is done is done, and calmly continue on to where you're headed.

*“Inexperience and immaturity cause teen accidents & deaths.”*

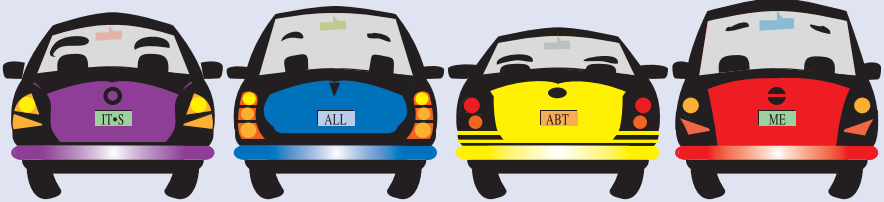
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# Others-Awareness!?

In life, it's not always about you.



On the road this is especially true. Even safe drivers sometimes find themselves in a pile-up. Watching out for others is called “defensive driving.” Everyone on the road is heading somewhere. Everyone has a story, a goal, a complaint, an agenda, an excuse—something to keep us from being at our best when we get behind the wheel.

Wave people in when they signal that they want to pull in front of you; don't speed up. If someone offers to let you in, show appreciation to remind him or her that inside these impersonal machines of steel and horsepower are real people who appreciate kindness and courtesy. You not only can avoid a negative situation, you can create a positive road experience for other drivers.

Be alert! Watch out for road and utility repair crews, vehicles pulled over onto the shoulder, bicyclists, landscapers, runners, police officers directing traffic or trash collectors.

Sharing the road can potentially mean danger; watching out for others isn't just an option.

A parking lot is often the site of a driver's first accident. There are no stop signs, so don't assume the right of way. When you back out of a parking spot, look for cars and pedestrians! And don't race for that precious mall parking spot!

*“On average, a pedestrian is killed (in the US) in a traffic crash every 96 minutes.”*

[www.drdriving.org/pedestrians/](http://www.drdriving.org/pedestrians/)

# U sing Common Sense! (duh)

These days, it seems like everyone has a **cell phone**, which is certainly handy for emergencies and for keeping in touch when you are running late. But keeping it real... we know that cell phones are **not** just used for emergencies; cell phone usage has gotten totally **out of control!** It used to be that **200** daytime minutes and **300** anytime minutes sounded a lot, but now it's the bare minimum.

**Enter:** potential pitfalls and possible danger.



And of course no automobile is without a **CD-player/AM-FM Radio**, a 6-disk changer, 12-button pre-sets and upgraded speakers so that we can be sure the music we listen to is something we want to hear.

And while we're at it... **eating, drinking, applying make-up, changing clothes(!?), grabbing stuff from floor or back seat, or kidding around with your friends** can all take your eyes off the road and make swerving into your neighbor's lane unannounced an unfortunate and dangerous possibility.

Some states insist on the use of a hands-free headset to keep both hands on the steering wheel while talking on the phone. Other states nix cell phone use for drivers under eighteen. Whatever your local laws, driving safety means **keeping your mind on the road**. Anything that distracts you is potentially lethal when you are faced with split-second decisions.

Oh, and keep the **VOLUME!!!!** of the radio or CD player low enough so you are able to listen for emergency vehicles.

**Hands** on wheel. **Eyes** on road. **Mind** on driving!

# Road rage

As we have already heard, **Road Rage** is not something that only happens in California. As with a lot of trends, it might have begun on the west coast\*; but it is a phenomenon that has become a problem nationwide...even world-wide.

Here are some troubling statistics that help bring home the point:

- One study showed 53% of drivers had “road rage disorder.”
- There are several billion “aggressive exchanges” between drivers in the United States every day.
- The growth rate of “violent aggressive driving” increased 7% annually from 1990–1996.
- Aggressive driving is a factor in nearly 28,000 highway deaths a year.\*\*

Every one of us has a boiling point, and when events seem to conspire to push us to that point, we are each faced with a decision. **Remember:** what is true in life is even truer on the road.



Maybe **Road Rage** is worse in southern California because the weather is so hot. In the summer, the mercury rises and you can even see the heat rise off the blacktop. The A/C is cranking; the engine overheats; clothes get hot and sticky. It's easy not to be at your very best.

\* Actually, an early incident of road rage can be found in the ancient Greek play, “Oedipus Rex.”

\*\* [http://www.caraccident.com/gen\\_info/question09.html](http://www.caraccident.com/gen_info/question09.html).

Add to this a **honking horn**, **a car cutting you off**, an **obscene gesture** by someone **yelling something about your mother**. Inside a voice growls, “That guy is asking for it.”

A Rudyard Kipling poem entitled **If** begins,



If you can keep your head  
When all about you  
Are losing theirs  
And blaming it on you...

Time to locate some inner strength, keep your head, control your response...even when the traffic, weather, and everything around you are getting on your last nerve. This is what it means to be your own person. It doesn't take much to lash out when things bother you...any two-year-old can do that.

### Who is the strong person?

You are, when you opt for courtesy, rise above the circumstances, and change the course of events— for your and for those around you.

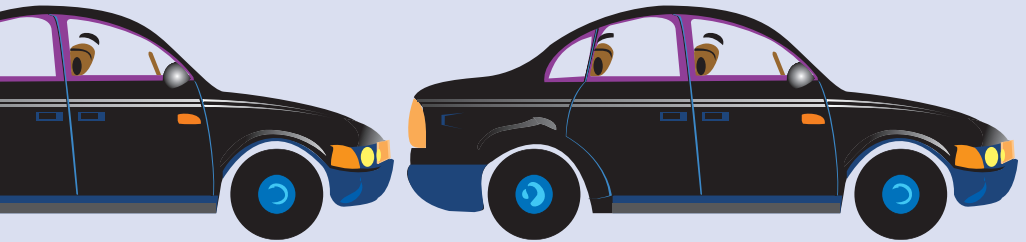
[www.smoothoperatorprogram.com/how\\_avoid\\_being.html](http://www.smoothoperatorprogram.com/how_avoid_being.html)

*“Remember that you can’t control traffic— but you can control yourself, your driving, and your emotions.”*

# Tailgating

Following at a safe distance is something anyone with a learner's permit already knows. The rule is one car length between you and the car in front of you for every 10 mph you go. It's common sense.

When the driver in front of you suddenly brakes for a groundhog...you'll wish you had obeyed this rule. As you slam on your brakes and hope that they grab in time to avoid the rear bumper that is approaching with alarming speed, you will be promising yourself that **next time** you'll stay back!



As for road courtesy, **tailgating is aggressive behavior**, like someone getting in your face, invading your personal space. It's scary when someone creeps up on your bumper, especially at night, with their headlights glaring in your rear view mirror.

Do you tap the brakes, flashing brake lights to **"send a message"** to the driver behind you? **At best**, it says, "hey buddy, get back." **At worst**, the tailgater could be so close that even slight braking could cause a collision. Do you speed up, and pull away to create a safer distance? This *might* cause the tailgater to stay back...**or it might have the opposite effect**.

Instead, turn on your signal and pull over to the right when it is safe. If you are shaken up (a pretty understandable reaction to aggressive behavior, on the road or anywhere!), collect yourself before moving on. **Tailgating is the opposite of road courtesy!**

# E

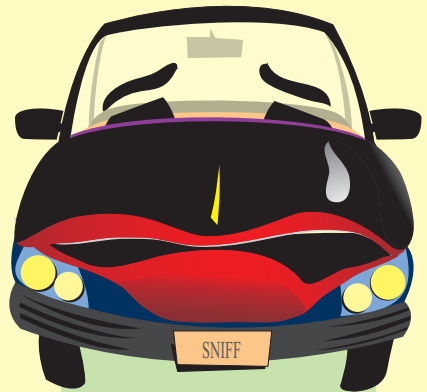
## Emotional driving

Everyone's heard of **DWI: Driving While Intoxicated**. It means someone has had enough alcohol to impair his or her judgment. Here is a new acronym for you: **DWE: Driving While Emotional**.

Emotions range from **elation** to **depression** to **anger** to **excitement**. When there's trouble at home, some people storm out the door and get in their cars, turn the key in the ignition, throw the car into reverse, pull out and floor the gas pedal. Emotion usually translates into speed. The faster you go, the less control you have over your car. When people are emotional they tend to drive like they just don't care—like they are the only ones on the road. Heck with everyone else!

But it's not just about anger. Imagine that it is the evening of high school graduation. What are some of the things you feel? **Relieved?** **Happy?** **Vulnerable?** **Invulnerable!** **Excited?** **Sad?** **Fearful?** Inconsiderate behavior sometimes accompanies high school graduation: throwing beer bottles and other litter on people's lawns and bashing mail boxes. Emotions translate into vandalism. People do things that they wouldn't consider doing at other times. They are **DWE**—driving while emotional; unfortunately, courtesy is forgotten.

Mastering your emotions is a **life skill** that's crucial when you are behind the wheel of a 5000-pound vehicle. Emotions cloud judgment and can cause damage, even death, unless you decide to control them.



*"...most people routinely drive in an emotionally impaired state."*

[www.drdriving.org/courses/conference\\_paper.htm](http://www.drdriving.org/courses/conference_paper.htm)

# Signaling



This component most obviously embodies the idea of “courtesy.” Letting other drivers know your intentions treats them respectfully and communicates awareness and a caring attitude.

When you are going to be home later than expected, when you are delayed and running behind schedule, when you can’t make an appointment, when a change of plans is going to affect others...the right thing to do is communicate and let everyone know what to expect.

Once again, driving imitates life.

When you plan to turn off the highway onto an exit ramp whose posted speed is less than that of the main road, signaling alerts the driver behind you that you will be slowing down as you exit. He or she will know what to expect and can plan accordingly—either slowing down, too, or shifting over to the left lane to safely pass.

Signaling is driver-to-driver communication. Changing lanes without signaling is rude. Not knowing what to expect, the driver behind you becomes tense, even resentful—especially if you don’t signal before cutting him or her off! Yeeeouch!

Signaling demonstrates awareness of Others and is one of the key ingredients in safe, smart, and courteous driving.

# So what is the **Y** in **COURTESY**?

The **Y** is for **YOU!**

**YOU** can make a difference.

This is what we want from you:

**a commitment to say YES**

**to road awareness,**

**to road safety,**

**to road courtesy.**

Our magnet, featuring our geeky (but lovable) mascot and spokes-car **Sheldon**<sup>™</sup>, goes on the back of your car. It says that you agree to be accountable for your behavior on the road: to **NOT** **cut people off,** **swerve into other lanes,** **tailgate,** **neglect to signal** or engage in any other **aggressive,** **dangerous** or **UN-courteous driving** behavior.

**One driver—YOU!—  
can make a difference.**

By signing up for the **Campaign for Courtesy on the Road** and putting the Sheldon magnet on the back of your car, you can do your part to improve life on the road! **(And you might even win something!)**

## A WORD FROM...

**Major William McMahon**

**Acting Chief of Police**

**Howard County, Maryland**

*Traffic collisions are a significant public safety problem in Howard County, just as they are throughout the nation. During a typical year, more than **20 people are killed** on Howard County roads. Not only are those lives lost, but the lives of their families and friends are shattered and changed forever. In addition, collisions lead to serious injuries and significant property damage and loss.*

*The good news is that most of these collisions can be prevented. The **Howard County Department of Police** is committed to educational and enforcement programs to reduce these incidents. However, we know that we cannot do this alone. It will take each motorist taking individual responsibility for his or her driving behavior to effect real change and make our roads safer. The **Campaign for Courtesy on the Road** program contains very useful information for all drivers, regardless of their driving experience. The dangerous driving behaviors mentioned in **COURTESY**, along with excessive speed, impaired driving and refusal to utilize occupant safety devices, contribute to most of the carnage we see on the roadways. I challenge each driver to consider your role in making the roads safer for everyone.*

**C**utting people off  
**O**thers-awareness!?  
**U**sing common sense  
**R**oad rage!  
**T**ailgating  
**E**motional driving (DWE)  
**S**ignaling  
**Y**ou can make a difference!



## Let us catch YOU being courteous!

As you drive around with our magnet on your car, you may be part of a “**Sheldon Sighting.**” Students spotted driving courteously are eligible to win **cool stuff**, donated by local business. Be sure we have the LICENSE PLATE NUMBER of the car you drive so we know it’s **YOU** being safe, smart & courteous on the road!

## What can you win?

Not just one prize, but a prize package full of great stuff, including:

Gas cards, oil changes, car washes, gift cards for great restaurants, fast food, ice cream, coffee, tech stuff, music, tickets to concerts, movies, sporting events + shows, gift cards for fun activities, electronics, sports gear, hair styling, manicures, facials, massages...whew!...and new prizes are being added all the time!

Your school is behind you. Your parents are behind you. In fact, the entire community is totally behind you, **so get Sheldon behind you** (on your car!!!) and join the convoy for Courtesy on the Road!

**Courtesy on the Road: cuz everyone loves winning!**

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8775 Cloudleap Court, Suite P63, Columbia, Maryland 21045  
Phone: 443-285-9800 Email: [info@courtesyontheroad.com](mailto:info@courtesyontheroad.com)  
Web: [www.courtesyontheroad.com](http://www.courtesyontheroad.com)



**Courtesy on the Road, Inc.** is a non-profit organization that provides educational materials to high school drivers at no cost to students or schools. Your donations are tax-deductible + appreciated.

All material in this curriculum is intended to supplement state and national driving laws. While there is no guarantee against automobile accidents, the principles contained herein may be helpful in becoming a safer, more aware driver.

