

Anxiety and Trauma Clinic

Tel: (+27) 11 883 4552

Fax: (+27) 11 883 4553

Website: www.atclinic.co.za

e-mail: info@atclinic.co.za

November 4, 2009

Road Rage

The cleverest fighter is the one who stays away from the fight to begin with. When it comes to controlling “road rage” incidents, the same rule applies. It’s just not worth making your point about a bad lane change when the consequences could rocket into a shoulder shootout.

Here are a few tips to help avoid getting forced into a road rage situation in to begin with – and for reducing tension if one develops despite your best intentions:

To Start with, be a courteous driver

That means not cutting into line (or cutting anyone off) as well as allowing other drivers to merge. Also, it’s a good idea to let faster-moving cars overtake you, even if they are going way over the speed limit.

Keep A Safe Distance

If the car in front of you slows down, you could and probably will go into the back of him if you do not keep a safe following distance. Even if there’s no accident, driving close to another car’s bumper is a hostile act that can quickly get out of hand. Always give the car ahead at least a car length’s space; preferably two perhaps even three. Driving too close to other drivers will only make them nervous – or angry. You may even tempt someone to slam on their brakes – to “teach you a lesson.”

Do not make faces at other drivers or make rude gestures

You have no way of knowing whether the other motorist you’re making faces has had one of the worst days on this particular day – and just looking for someone just to take his or her frustrations out on. He/she may have just been fired from his/her job, or the person might of just got divorced and he/she’s not about to take any nonsense from you. Even if another driver does something obnoxious, it’s better to pretend you did not see it. If you are a woman or have children with you, avoiding angry, potentially violent male road-ragers is especially vital.

Breathe

Breathing exercises can help you cleanse your body of stale air and stale energy, getting your blood more oxygenated and, of course, getting rid of tension. Putting your attention towards your breathing brings your attention inward and makes frustrations seem more removed,

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without taking your focus too far away from the road. At the Anxiety and Trauma Clinic we have experts who can teach you various breathing techniques.

Avoid unnecessary actions

Don't block driveways or double park your car. And clearly, using a handicapped spot if you're not actually handicapped is a major breach of etiquette.

In the event you do something stupid behind the wheel – but not intentionally aggressive – such as accidentally cutting in front of someone you didn't see and almost causing an accident, or skipping your turn at a four-way intersection because you weren't paying attention – the thing to do is to instantly signal your apologies to other motorists with a smile and “oops, I'm sorry!” hand gesture than lets them realise you know you made a mistake. Don't just drive on through and act as though nothing is wrong. Do the right thing and the problem almost always disappears.

How to deal with another driver's road rage

If you find yourself in a situation where another motorist is clearly angry with you – rightly or not – and seems insistent on following you, or acting aggressively, don't allow yourself to be caught up in the game.

- If a guy rolls down his window and starts swearing at you, do not react.
- Keep your window rolled up – and avoid eye contact.
- Keep Driving– and get away – as soon as you can.
- Never, ever get out of your car to “Speak about” things with another motorist. We live in a crazy time, and you could find yourself with a gun to your head. Or being stabbed with a knife. Just keep on driving. In the event you get followed, don't drive home – or stop your car.
- Call your security company, the police and drive to the nearest police station.
- If possible, let your harasser see you talking on the phone; that's often enough to get rid of him or her.
- If you can find a busy shopping centre parking lot or similar public place where there are a lot of people– go there and see if the person follows you. If he does, hoot and don't stop hooting to attract the attention of passers-by and – hopefully – security guards. It's unlikely you pursuer will stick with you.
- If you can, jot down the number plate of the car, as well as the make, model and colour.

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Play

Use cognitive-behavioral interventions like counting how many people drive like total idiots. In a nut shell, if you accept that a certain amount of people are going to make fools of themselves on the road, and decide to make a game out of counting them, you can reduce the stress you feel in response to their rude maneuvers

Plan

Manage your time smartly, you will find, when you are frustrated on the road, it's because you are in a rush and can't get there fast enough because of traffic. Organising your schedule so you can leave earlier, and planning for traffic, can leave you feeling less stressed and more relaxed because it really won't matter as much if the trip takes a few extra minutes.

We are here to help :

Here at the Anxiety and Trauma Clinic we have experts who are waiting to assist you . Call us for a booking or for any question which you may have. We're here to answer any question or concern that is on your mind. Call us on (011) 883-4552, or email us on info@atclinic.co.za