

# Best Practice Guide

## Controlling Emotions



### **Are You In Control?**

An emotion is a temporary state of mind which can affect a person's behaviour.

Emotions can be triggered in a number of ways. For example, a person may be scared by a frightening situation; may be upset after hearing bad news; may be angry after a conversation with a colleague or may be euphoric after a happy surprise.

Being in control of your emotions is a crucial element in safe driving as losing control can lead to risk-taking, mistakes, distracted behaviour, crashes and even altercations with other road users. Some simple techniques can help.

## Avoid Stresses On The Road

Drivers sometimes get frustrated on particular journeys -especially if they have to travel through busy areas. If possible plan your route to avoid peak times and the busiest roads. You may find that choosing a scenic route - or varying your route on different days - can help to keep your mood positive.

## Avoid Driving To Cool Off

You should never go for a drive to 'cool off' - in fact you should refrain from driving completely after an argument or particularly stressful situation as you would be more likely to take risks and make mistakes.

If you ever find yourself in a situation where you need to cool off you should think of a different activity to help vent your frustration - such as going for a jog, playing a sport or simply taking 'time out'.

## Plan Ahead

If you are rushing to arrive at an appointment on time or if you are unsure of your route and worried about getting lost your emotions are likely to be running high - and you are more likely to feel stressed and anxious. Always plan your route carefully and allow plenty of time for journeys to help keep your emotions in check.

## Accept Mistakes

If another driver makes a mistake on the road do not:

- Flash your lights.
- Hurl abuse.
- Drive as close as you can to them just to prove a point.

Retaliating in any of these ways will only make you feel worse - and could lead to a potentially dangerous altercation with the other driver. Instead, accept that the driver either misjudged the situation or made a bad decision. And don't forget that we all make mistakes sometimes!

## Breathe!

If you find yourself in a potentially stressful situation while driving you can help to control your emotions by breathing deeply. Take a few deep breaths from as far down in your stomach as you can - not just from your chest. You could also try repeating a word or phrase such as 'Relax', or 'I am calm' slowly and gently to yourself. Keep repeating the phrase while taking deep breaths.



## Watch For The Signs Of Stress

Look out for signs that you may be stressed, such as:

- Feelings of aggression.
- Having regular near-misses or collisions.
- A lack of concentration.

If it is driving itself that seems to stress you out you need to find a way of removing this stress - by changing your route, varying your journey or avoiding the busiest times. However, people who experience stress behind the wheel often experience stress in everyday life. If you feel that might be suffering from stress you should visit your doctor as soon as possible to discuss the situation and, if necessary, arrange treatment.

## Get Your Sleep

Driving while tired is extremely dangerous as not only do you risk falling asleep while driving, but you are also likely to be out of control of your emotions, more irritable, less patient and more likely to make mistakes. Controlling your emotions before they

affect your driving ability is key to being a safe driver and getting enough sleep can help with this.

## Eliminate In-Vehicle Triggers

Many factors can trigger negative emotions while you are driving, including:

- Listening to 'angry' music which involves shouting or Banging.
- Screaming children.
- Using your horn.
- Disagreements with passengers.

Eliminate as many factors as possible, such as avoiding disagreements while travelling and only listening to 'positive' music. For parents it is not possible to avoid travelling with children but having another adult with you while travelling can help - and if carrying older children you should explain why it is dangerous to distract the driver.



## Consider The Consequences

If you are in a situation where your emotions are running high the most important thing to consider before reacting is what the possible consequences of your actions could be. This is particularly important when driving.

For example, you might think that speeding up close behind a car that has just cut you up will teach them a lesson, but it will also put YOU at serious risk of a crash if the other driver then slams on their brakes. Never take chances on the road, and never try to look for opportunities to teach other drivers a lesson.

- E** Ensure you plan your route to avoid the busiest roads.
- M** Mistakes happen - so let them go.
- O** Only drive when your emotions are under control.
- T** Try deep breathing to keep your calm.
- I** In-vehicle emotional triggers should be avoided.
- O** Only drive when you have had enough sleep.
- N** Never drive to cool off from an argument.
- S** Signs of stress should be taken seriously - see your GP if necessary.

## WARNING

Many drivers are injured or killed each year in road rage incidents which often start as minor incidents but escalate when one or more of the parties involved lose control of their emotions.