

Stay calm and drive on—tips to manage road rage

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With parents and children gearing up to go back to school, you can expect there to be more cars on the road. While traffic can be extremely irritating, it is important to keep calm and avoid a road rage situation, said a Baylor College of Medicine expert.

"Road rage is a generalized anger toward others while driving or operating a vehicle," said Dr. Asim Shah, a professor in the Menninger Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Baylor. "Road rage can manifest in numerous ways. For example, you could be driving at a normal speed or in your own lane and then somebody cuts you off. This can trigger road rage within you or is a sign that the other driver is already experiencing road rage."

Shah added that road rage can occur when people have pre-existing mood disorders or have trouble handling stress, anxiety or anger. The pressure to arrive to your destination on [time](#) can increase anxiety, he said.

"Everyone has to be at work on time; however, on any given day or time, there could be a traffic jam due to an accident on the highway and you will get delayed," Shah said.

"Weather conditions and accidents, especially in bigger cities like Houston, are often overlooked causes of road rage too. When it rains, traffic stops. It's the same road and the same people but [weather conditions](#) cause problems."

Distracted driving is another common contributor to road rage situations, Shah said. For example, when people are talking or texting on their phones, they can easily miss that a light has turned from red to green so they hold up the drivers behind them.

According to Shah, road rage can result in violence. He warned that fatal situations have occurred due to a combination of road rage, access to firearms and an inability to control impulses.

Shah cautions that with school starting, it is even more important to keep a level head when driving.

"The first two or three months of every school year are the worst for traffic. People are just not used to the drive. Parents may not know where to drop off or pick up their child or what time is best to leave the house," Shah said. "If it takes 45 minutes to come from home to work, it could all of a sudden take an hour and 15 minutes."

Shah suggests drivers avoid school zones and leave the house earlier in order to avoid becoming upset, irritated, stressed or anxious.

In addition, Shah said you should keep the purpose of your journey in mind.

"Let's say you are dropping off your child at school and suddenly someone cuts you off. You might want to get out the car and confront the other driver but that's not a good idea," Shah said. "While other drivers might understand that it's not your fault, you are still delaying yourself and the other cars behind you. It's not going to serve any purpose. Your purpose was to drop the child off and go to work. You have to think about what you want to achieve, which is driving your child to school on time and getting to work on time. If you have to swallow a little bit of your pride by not arguing with the other driver, it's

worth it."

According to Shah, if you are in a position in which you are the target of another driver's road rage, you should simply ignore the driver.

"If somebody honks at you, which is usually the starting point of road rage, ignore them. The same advice applies if somebody comes close to your car and starts screaming at you. Ignore them and don't open your window," Shah said. "You are not a weak person if you ignore them; instead, you are a stronger person because you are not engaging in that type of behavior. It can be difficult not to respond, but it's the safest thing to do."

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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