

## **ANTISOCIAL DRIVERS**



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## Prosocial Driver Training for Prevention and Rehabilitation

*By*

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## **ANTISOCIAL DRIVERS**



## Chapter 1

### THINKING AND DRIVING

**W**hy are so many drivers inconsiderate, selfish, and rude? Why do so many drivers act as though they have never learned basic social skills? Why are there so many antisocial drivers – individuals who frequently drive in a manner that disregards the rights of others to be treated courteously, fairly, and safely?

#### *Auto-Metamorphosis?*

Driving seems to bring out the worst in people. Prosocial behavior ends and antisocial behavior begins for many individuals as soon as they get in their car. Polite behavior is replaced by rudeness; friendliness by hostility; kindness by callousness; empathy by egocentricity. Many individuals drive as if too much carbon monoxide has seeped into their cars and killed the cells in their brains that normally regulate their behavior.

#### *If Looks Could Kill*

Anyone who spends time on the road is exposed to antisocial driving. Some individuals are content to respond to the offensive behavior of antisocial drivers with a shrug of their shoulders. Some react by shaking their heads or *tut-tutting*. However, many drivers have become intolerant. Some have exhausted their lexicon of profanity in cursing at drivers whom they judge to have the intelligence or moral values of a reptile. Some react by pointing their middle finger in a perpendicular direction. Such reactions may enable them to ventilate their anger; however, they seldom have any long-term deterrent or educational benefit in terms of motivating antisocial drivers to abandon their egocentric, ill-mannered, or care-less driving behavior.

***Contagion***

After being subjected to the ill-mannered, irritating, aggravating, and dangerous behavior of other drivers on our roads and highways day after day, many drivers have responded by adopting the attitude, “if you can’t beat them; join them.” Many otherwise upright, law-abiding citizens have reacted to their daily exposure to antisocial driving by behaving as though the rules that usually guide their social behavior are neither necessary nor appropriate on the road. Many drivers have been trained in *defensive* driving. Many more appear to have been trained in *offensive* driving.

Traffic researchers used to refer to antisocial drivers as “deviant drivers.” We reject that label because there are now so many of them that they are no longer deviant, at least in the statistical sense. Antisocial driving is contagious. It is becoming the norm in most countries. It already is the norm in many countries.

***Retaliation***

Many individuals react to the antisocial behavior of other drivers by engaging in retaliatory behavior that is just as antisocial as the behavior of those whose driving upset them. The most extreme form of antisocial driving occurs when incivility and retaliation spiral into violence in the form of “Road Rage.” However, the majority of retaliatory acts do not involve direct violence. Many take the form of aggressive, risky driving maneuvers that increase the antagonism between the drivers and can spell disaster on the highway without a blow being struck.

***Careful Drivers Beware***

Many antisocial drivers are intolerant of *careful* drivers. Resenting cautious drivers who inconvenience them or delay them, they respond by engaging in high-risk maneuvers without regard to civility, legality, or safety. Individuals who choose to drive carefully and cautiously now do so at their peril.

***Beware of Careful Drivers***

The reaction of many individuals to the perceived risks to their safety posed by antisocial drivers is anxiety or panic. Their fear may cause

them to become so hesitant and indecisive that their driving becomes hazardous both to themselves and other drivers.<sup>1</sup>

### ***End of the Road***

Some individuals have been so traumatized by their encounters with antisocial drivers that they have given up driving altogether. Fear of driving may develop at any age. However, in an aging population, a growing number of drivers are becoming increasingly hesitant to drive as they come to realize that they no longer are able to cope with antisocial drivers whose impulsive, rapid, risky, or aggressive maneuvers tax the aging driver's declining vision, hearing, and reaction time. Ironically, governmental concern about the inordinate number of collisions among aging drivers tends to focus on the deterioration in the driving *skills* of the greying population rather than on the driving *style* of those with whom they must interact on the road.

## **THE ANTISOCIAL DRIVING CULTURE**

Driving is a learned behavior. Like all learned behaviors, it is strongly influenced by one's culture. The decline in courtesy, cooperation, good manners, and concern for others; and the increase in aggressive, risky, reckless, and selfish behavior on the roadways may well be a function of similar changes in society at large.

Antisocial driving should not be viewed as a new phenomenon spawned by the complexities of modern life or the stresses of traffic congestion or the development of powerful engines. Antisocial driving used to be called "Jehu," a phenomenon that has been around for centuries: "*The chariots shall rage in the streets; they shall jostle one against another in the broad ways*" (Book of Nahum, Ch. 2, Verse 4, Holy Bible).

However, it can be argued that the current population of drivers has been raised in a norm of aggressive driving; a "hurry up and wait" and a "me first" mentality. They have been subjected to countless advertisements that extol the horsepower of cars, but fail to note that they can be demolished even when they are driven at rates of speed that require only a fraction of such power. Many automobile manufacturers label their products with the names of wild animals, and proudly proclaim

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1. Research on driving-related fear has been reported by Taylor, Deane & Podd (2002).