Always remember that the primary goal in defensive driving is to stay safe and live to drive another day.

“Don’t Drive Away Angry, Just Drive Away”

ROAD SAFETY UNIT

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT, WORKS AND HOUSING

FRUSTRATION, AGGRESSION & ROAD RAGE

“Walk, Ride & Drive For Life”

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Frustration, Aggression and Road Rage

Frustration occurs when someone or something impedes your progress toward a goal. In the driving environment our goal is to get to our destination as quickly and as safely as possible. When other road users interfere with our progress we become frustrated. In the driving environment, increases in aggression can have deadly consequences. Frustration can lead to any or all of the following aggressive behaviour:

- Excessive speeding or street racing
- Following too closely (tailgating)
- Failure to yield right of way
- Red light running
- Horn honking
- Weaving in traffic
- Cutting in front of other drivers

All of these aggressive driving behaviours place drivers at an increased risk of crashing. Fortunately although frustration does often lead to an increased likelihood of aggression, there is a strong cognitive component that influences the way that we perceive the source of frustration as well as the particular form of expression of that increased aggression.

The context in which frustration occurs can determine both the nature and extent of our own resulting aggressive behavior. There are also differences in people’s natural propensities. Some drivers are content to mutter curses to themselves while others are provoked to physical violence. Both personal attributes and situational factors can moderate our aggressive responses.

Some experts distinguish between aggressive driving and road rage. Aggressive driving is instrumental, that is, it serves to further progress toward a desired outcome when we are frustrated. Road rage is simply hostile and is aimed at causing harm to others who frustrate us. Try to distinguish this important difference in the behavior of other road users.

Here are some thoughts and ideas that may help you to understand the sources of frustration in the driving environment and to help you mediate your aggressive responses to those sources of frustration:

- Other road users are probably equally frustrated in traffic, perhaps more so. They may not be as prepared for traffic.
- Be courteous and forgiving. Your behavior may serve to reduce their levels of frustration and consequently their levels of aggression and risk-taking, thereby making the traffic environment safer for everyone, including you.
- Do not fret over people, conditions and things that you cannot control. Choose your battles wisely and save your energy and emotions for situations that you can influence.
- Recognize that traffic flows smoother and you will get there sooner if everyone cooperates and work together.
- Do not confront road rage. Because it is irrational behavior in the first place, aimed at doing psychological or physical harm to others, argument and discussion cannot “win the day”. Stay in your vehicle and avoid eye contact and communicating with angry road users and keep as much distance between them and you as possible. Let them have their way and rage elsewhere where they are least likely to put you at risk.