## Rules of the Road

Driving the kids to practice, commuting to work, running errands--many people spend a good part of their day in their cars. In today's world, rudeness compromises safety in more ways than one. Developing patience and practicing defensive driving will make you a safer and more courteous driver.

**Good Manners = Safety**

Two reminders: 1) Always wear your seat belt and insist that your passengers do. 2) Never drink and drive. These safeguards are the most thoughtful acts of all as they can save lives. Here are four other basics:

- *Driving a car requires your full attention.* Distractions, such as putting on makeup, snacking, using your iPod, texting, or chatting on a cell phone, interfere with your ability to respond physically and mentally.
- *Signal your intentions.* Using your turn signals before turning a corner or switching lanes is a must.
- *Drive at the speed limit.* Driving too slowly can also cause accidents.
- *Keep some distance between you and the car ahead of you.* Tailgating is both

aggressive and a sure way to rear-end someone who stops suddenly.

**Driving Don'ts**

Individual drivers have their own particular pet peeves, but the following behaviors by either aggressive or clueless drivers can aggravate even patient drivers:

- Blocking the passing lane for more than a reasonable amount of time.
- Speeding up when you're being passed.
- Driving in the breakdown lane to pass a long line of stopped traffic.
- Daydreaming at a stoplight after it turns green.
- Making left turns from the right lane, or vice versa.
- Not using turn signals.
- Creeping along while talking on a cell phone.
- "Blocking the box," or becoming stuck in the middle of an intersection.

**Don't Take It Personally**

Always remind yourself not to take traffic problems personally. Never focus your generalized anger on a single incident, which could become the flash point for a dangerous conversation.

**"Beep Beep"**

Your horn is an important device that's there to be used. The secret is to use it in the right way:

- A succession of short, light beeps: "Hi!"
- A quick little beep: "Heads up--I'm here!"
- A slightly louder, slightly longer beep: "Hey, the light's been green for ten seconds" or "Watch it!"
- A longer blast, repeated several times: "Come on, let's go--I'm in a real hurry."
- A long, nonstop blast: "I'm really angry and I've lost control."

When you start taking your frustration out by using your horn, it's a sign you've crossed the line.

**Be Considerate of Your Passengers**

It can be nerve-racking to be a passenger in a car that's being driven too fast: You're not the one at the wheel, and essentially you have no control over your safety. When you're the driver, be aware of your passengers' comfort levels. Also, as the driver, you set the tone in the car. Speak pleasantly and calmly when making requests rather than yelling "Be quiet" at your passengers.

**Handling a Backseat Driver**

You know the type, they question your every move and offer unsolicited advice. It's distracting and annoying, and there's no perfect retort that will silence your critic. Ignoring it or using humor are your best bets, but if it's more than you can handle, pull over and say, "When you're the driver, you get to make the calls. It's hard for me to focus with all these suggestions."

**Merge Manners**

Merging should be simple and efficient. Stay in your lane until it's time to merge and then allow a car or two ahead of you to merge, just to keep things moving. When you're trying to enter traffic, be sure there's truly enough time and space.

**Curiosity, Respect, or Emergency?**

Rubbernecking--slowing to a crawl to check out an accident--is disrespectful to the victims, a hindrance to those trying to help, and a sure way to cause a traffic backup. Yes, you should slow down so you don't endanger anyone, but keep moving.

If you encounter a funeral cortege, it's respectful to pull over to the side of the street until the cars have passed. The idea is to do what you can to keep the cars in the procession together.

**Parking Etiquette**

It's rude to take up two spaces or to cram an SUV or other large vehicle into a space reserved for compacts. If someone is waiting to turn into a parking space, don't steal it. Nor should your passenger stand in an empty space to save it. Make sure you leave enough room on both sides for passengers to get out without bumping the adjacent car.

**At the Gas Pump**

Drive slowly and carefully to accommodate people who are standing at the pumps or walking back and forth to the store. When possible, pull up to the gas pump that will allow easiest access to unused pumps by other drivers.

**Taking Responsibility**

Accidents do happen, and when they do, do the right thing. If no one's around and you bump the car next to you or accidentally take off someone's side mirror, leave a note with your name and number to handle insurance with the owner. It's also important to be a responsible borrower. Return the vehicle in *exactly* the same condition it was borrowed, plus a full tank of gas.