

DRIVING SANE, SAFE, AND SOBER

EMOTIONS AND DRIVING

The strong feelings that we all experience can affect our ability to drive well. Fear, anger, anxiety, sadness, love, excitement, and joy all can influence our attitudes and how we interact with other drivers and pedestrians.

The teen years are possibly the most emotional years of our lives and they just happen to coincide with learning to drive a 2,000 pound vehicle on public streets. Controlling those emotions is a critical part of becoming a “good” driver.

How do emotions affect driving? Certain emotions can cause a driver to take greater risks while others can fog the brain and be distracting. Strong emotions can interfere with your ability to think, reason, and make wise judgments.

Even when you are emotionally neutral on a given day, other drivers on the road around you may not be. Watch for erratic behavior that might indicate an emotionally distressed or distracted driver.

Strong emotions also can have physical effects on you. Your heartbeat increases, muscles tense up, and digestion slows down. Add a dose of stressful city driving and you may discover that your ability to concentrate on the driving task is greatly diminished.



If you are aware of being more emotional than usual, make an extra effort to use the IPDE process to stay out of trouble. If you know you will be driving in a stressful environment, like heavy traffic that makes it hard to get to school or work fast, make a plan to deal with it. Try leaving earlier or taking a different route.

Passengers can contribute to your emotional state depending on the circumstances. Imagine the following situations as you are driving home alone from school. Then imagine the same situations with a car full of friends or teammates.

- You just made the cheerleading squad or football team.
- You just failed an important test.
- Your basketball team just won the state championship.
- Your girlfriend/boyfriend just broke up with you.
- You just found out your parents are getting divorced.
- You just got the job you've been wanting all year.

Would the way you feel, behave, and drive change with passengers in the car with you? Sharing an experience with others, especially close friends, can enhance the emotions you are experiencing, and whether they are happy or sad emotions, they can all affect the way you drive. You can help your friends by keeping emotions under control when you are their passenger. If things ever get too emotional and the driving too reckless, you should step in and volunteer to drive or ask to be let out. Treat the situation like it is life or death, because like a drunk driver, an emotionally distressed driver may not have total control over the driving task.

VISION

We often say that driving is more a mental task than a physical one but we also know that more than 90% of the information we gather while driving is through our eyes.

Good driving begins with good vision. We must be able to clearly and quickly IDENTIFY the open and closed zones around us before we do anything else. Once we gather the visual clues we need we use our mental abilities to PREDICT and DECIDE which actions to take (the physical part of driving).

Visual acuity is the ability to see things clearly both far away and close up. When your eyes move from the dashboard to check your speed and then back up to check the light at the intersection ahead, visual acuity allows your eyes to focus in at both distances. Normal visual acuity is called “20/20 vision” and means that you can read 11/32 inch letters from 20 feet away. Can you read the word below, clearly, from both eyes 20 feet away?

IDENTIFY

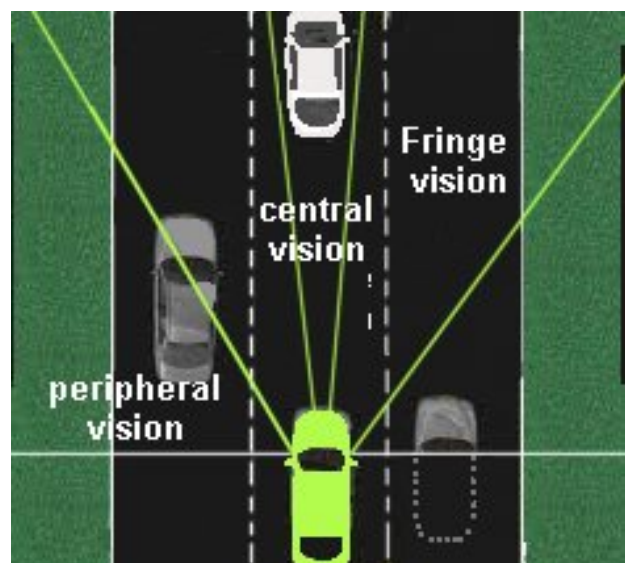
Idaho requires a minimum visual acuity of 20/40 in at least one eye, with or without corrective lenses. A person with 20/40 vision must be twice as close to an object to see it as clearly as a person with 20/20 vision. If you need corrective lenses to pass the vision screening test a lens restriction will be placed on your driver’s license and you must always wear those corrective lenses while driving.



A blurry view of a crosswalk

Color vision is the ability to distinguish one color from another. Not having this ability is called “color blindness.” How can a color blind driver drive without being able to tell if the traffic light is red, yellow, or green? (The lights may all appear “gray” but the position of each light – top, middle, or bottom – helps them navigate an intersection.)

Your “field of vision” is the entire area your eyes can see around you while looking straight ahead. Most people can see about 90 degrees to each side, or 180 degrees in total. However, you can only see clearly in your central vision – the 10% directly in front of you. As speed increased this field gets smaller and objects in your fringe and peripheral vision begin to blur. Some people have permanent “tunnel vision”, allowing them to only see 140 degrees or less. A driver with tunnel vision must move his head and eyes more often to compensate. Do you have tunnel vision? Stand with your arms straight out to your sides like you are mimicking an airplane. While looking straight ahead, can you see the tips of your fingers when you wiggle them?



Depth perception is the ability to judge the distance between yourself and other objects. It is even more difficult when the objects are moving. Can you think of any driving situations in which depth perception would be important?

Every time you get into a vehicle to drive you rely on accurate depth perception to control the zones around you. Knowing the distance between your vehicle and the curb, other cars, pedestrians, intersections, stop lines, and parking spaces are all very important. If a driver has poor depth perception he or she can compensate by increasing following distance, leaving more space than necessary between the car and other objects, and allowing greater distances at night.

Everyone sees less at night than in daylight. Details of objects are fuzzy, colors are harder to identify, and only those objects that are lit or reflective are visible at all. In some rural areas it might be completely dark except for the narrow patch of roadway by your headlights.

Some people have such poor night vision that it is classified as “night blindness.” For them driving at night is almost impossible and certainly not safe.

Glare occurs during daytime as sunlight reflects off shiny objects, making it very difficult to see. Glare occurs at nighttime too, when headlights and other bright lights reflect off those same shiny objects. Sudden exposure to bright lights will cause your pupils to contract and you can be temporarily blinded. It might take several long seconds before your eyes recover. This “glare recovery time” can be hazardous at high speeds or on crowded roads. At 40 mph you can travel more than the length of a football field while before your full vision returns! To avoid glare, look away momentarily and use the right edge of the roadway as a guide.

Your other senses are involved in driving as well. Your hearing can warn you of oncoming trains, honking horns, and the sirens of emergency vehicles. You can also detect mechanical problems early by listening for unusual noises from your vehicle. Getting in the habit of having music blasting while you drive can be very dangerous, as you will miss many or all of these auditory warnings. Using a cell phone and talking while driving will also take your ears off of the driving task.

Your sense of smell can detect an overheating engine and exhaust fumes that have somehow gotten inside your vehicle.

Your sense of motion helps you understand what your vehicle is doing in relation to the road, speed, and direction. A tire going flat can be felt before seen or heard.

PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

Some disabilities, like fatigue and illness, are temporary and experienced by everyone.

Fatigue is involved in nearly one out of every five crashes – and the drivers had no idea they were tired enough to fall asleep at the wheel before they crashed. Fatigue is caused by lack of sleep, physical effort, or emotional stress.

Danger signs of fatigue while driving include:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Eyes closing or “long blinking”
- Continuous yawning
- Confusion
- Inability to remain in your lane or lane position
- Difficulty keeping your head up

Your body wants to sleep between 12am-6am and again at 2pm. Be cautious while driving during these times, especially on long trips. Rest or sleep are the only solutions to being fatigued but if you have to drive here are some tips:

- Rest before you drive
- Change drivers often
- Stop and get out to stretch every few hours
- Wear sunglasses to prevent additional eye fatigue
- Use your orderly visual search pattern to keep your eyes active
- Be as active as possible, listen to the radio, talk to passengers, or sing
- If you are too drowsy to continue, pull off the road in a safe location, lock the doors and sleep.



Illness affects the way our bodies function – including when we drive. But many of the medications we take for our symptoms can also numb our senses, make us drowsy, or make us dizzy. If you are not feeling well think twice about driving. Are you alert enough to handle driving on that particular day? Is there another way to get where you need to go? Can you stay home and rest? If you take medicine make sure you search the label for side effects.

Some disabilities are permanent but special vehicles and adaptive equipment make it possible for many individuals with these disabilities to continue driving well into old age.

Old age itself can be a disability. As we age our reflexes slow down and our vision and concentration typically get worse. Failure to yield the right of way is the main cause of collisions for the elderly. Still, drivers over the age of 65 are involved in fewer collisions per mile driven than those under the age of 30.

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

Sure, you already know a lot about the effects of drugs and alcohol. You've probably even seen a lot of anti-drinking and driving videos in Health class and on television. But it will never happen to you, right? You stay in control. You always know when to stop. You always have a plan to get home safely.

The problem with drugs and alcohol is that they steal away your ability to make wise choices. They can put you in a mental and physical state that can only be described as being on "autopilot". At a certain level of intoxication the drug takes over and you don't know what you are doing. You may not even remember it later. If you survive. There are hundreds and hundreds of tragic examples out there we can use as examples. But do we pay attention to those examples? Even if many of them happened right here in Idaho? Right here in your community or in your school?

"It will never happen to me."

Don't fool yourself. If you choose to do drugs or drink alcohol you are putting yourself at risk for many bad things. Drinking and driving is just one of them. Over 10,000 alcohol-related traffic deaths occur each year in the U.S. alone.

You have to be under the influence to be cool, right? To fit in? To have the courage to talk to other people at parties? To be rebellious and break the rules? Hundreds of thousands of alcoholics, drug addicts, and impaired traffic fatalities have occurred before you were even born. They have already made the mistakes for us and we should learn from them. Will your generation be the first to break the cycle?

Part of the problem is the misunderstanding about alcohol. It is one of the most dangerous drugs in the world and is the most commonly found drug in fatally injured drivers.



The effects of alcohol vary from person to person but everyone who uses alcohol is affected by it. Beer and alcohol companies spend millions on advertisements that try to convince you that you “deserve” a drink today and that the only way to have fun and have friends is to include alcohol at your parties. In fact, it can't be a party without it, right? That's what they want you to think.

Alcohol is a depressant, not a stimulant, and it acts like the anesthetics that hospitals give patients to slow their body's down and put them to sleep. It is absorbed directly and quickly into the bloodstream through the walls of the digestive tract. Once it enters the bloodstream it quickly flows to the brain where it affects the person's judgment and reasoning – the two most important skills required for safe driving.



As the previous chart shows, whether it is a can of beer, shot of whiskey, glass of wine, cocktail, or wine cooler, they all have the same amount of alcohol in them. Just one drink will likely put you over .02% B.A.C. (blood alcohol concentration), the legal limit for drinking and driving for those under 21 in Idaho. And after just that one drink inhibitions are lessened and judgment and reasoning are affected. You should not operate a motor vehicle.

Three drinks will likely increase your B.A.C. to .05-.09% (.08% is the legal limit for adults in Idaho) and you will be unable to think clearly, your judgment and reasoning will be unreliable, and your coordination will be affected. You should not operate a motor vehicle.

Four drinks will likely increase your B.A.C. to .10-.12%, your hearing, speech, vision, balance, and most behaviors will be affected. You will be staggering around with slurred speech, and be overly emotional and expressive. You should not operate a motor vehicle but have likely lost the ability to make that decision yourself.

8-12 alcoholic drinks can increase your B.A.C. to between .40-.50% (depending on your weight and other factors) where nearly half of your blood is alcohol. At this extreme level you will lose bladder function and your breathing and heart rate will be affected. You will have fallen unconscious earlier, at around .30-.39 B.A.C., and at .40-.50 death is a real possibility.

Your responsibility as a friend to those who are drinking is to make sure they do not drive under the influence. Do everything in your power to take their keys, find them a sober ride home, or give them a place to sleep it off.

No amount of embarrassment or inconvenience is worse than a friend's preventable death.

DISTRACTED DRIVING

Distracted driving is any activity that could divert a person's attention away from the primary task of driving. All distractions endanger driver, passenger, and bystander safety.

The three types of distracted driving are visual, manual, and cognitive. Distractions while driving include:

- Texting
- Use a cell phone or smartphone
- Eat and drinking
- Talking to passengers
- Grooming
- Reading, including maps
- Using a navigation system
- Watching a video
- Adjust a music player

Because texting requires all three types of distraction it is the most alarming and possibly the most dangerous. It is believed we have yet to see the real problems of an entire society flying down the highway and driving our city and neighborhood streets while almost completely distracted.

Key Facts:

- In 2009 16% of all traffic fatalities were cause by distracted driving.
- In 2009 20% of all injury crashes were caused by distracted driving.
- In June of 2011 there were 196 billion text messages sent or received in the US, up nearly 50% from June of 2009.
- Teen drivers are more likely than any other age group to be involved in a fatal distracted driving crash.

- 40% of all American teens say they have been in a car when the drivers used a cell phone in a way that put people in danger.
- Drivers who use hand-held devices are 4-times more likely to get into serious injury crashes.
- Sending one receiving one text message takes a driver's eyes from the road for 4.6 seconds, the equivalent of driving (at 55 mph) the length of an entire football field, blind.
- Studies show that hands-free devices are not much safer than hand-held devices.
- Using a cell phone while driving delays a driver's reactions as much as having a B.A.C. of .08%, the legal limit for drinking and driving.

The information on this page comes from www.distraction.gov.



Visit www.distraction.gov to learn more, get involved, download the pledge, and hear personal stories from teens personally affected by distracted driving.

Idaho Public Driver Education

REVIEW QUESTIONS HOMEWORK PACKET 11

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

DIRECTIONS: Answer the following questions based on what you learned from the homework packet.

1. How can emotions affect driving?
2. More than ___% of the information we gather while driving is done with our eyes.
3. Visual _____ is the ability to see things clearly.
4. The 10% in the middle of your field of vision where things are the most clear is an area known as your _____ vision.
5. Knowing the distance between your car and another object is called _____ perception.
6. Name one driving-related emergency you can sense and avoid with your hearing
7. Name one driving-related emergency you can sense and avoid with your smell?
8. One of the main problems with taking any risk, is that most of us, especially under the age of 30, think that “it will _____ happen to me!”
9. Name the most commonly found drug involved in fatally car crashes.
10. After reading about the different B.A.C. levels and the physical consequences of each, what fact surprises or bothers you the most?
11. The three types of distracted driving are:
12. Sending one text message takes your eyes from the road for how long?