

HOW A ROAD RAGE INCIDENT OCCURS

(The Sequence of Steps)

ANGER (A NORMAL AND NATURAL HUMAN EMOTION)

- A road rage incident starts with anger, the emotion
- Anger is a fact of life; there is no way to avoid this feeling at times
 - ...On the roadways and elsewhere in our lives
- Anger is a normal and natural emotion that arises from how we interpret the physical arousal from the “fight or flight” stress response that all human beings experience
- This stress response can be triggered in us whenever:
 - ...We are startled or surprised
 - ...We feel fearful, threatened, or endangered
 - ...We believe that things around us are “out of control”
 - ...We feel insecurity, uncertainty, or self-doubt
- On the positive side, our anger can be a source of discovery
 - ...It tells us that “something is going on” within us or around us that needs to be attended to
- Especially related to driving, anger is often experienced when we believe that:
 - ...Our wants, needs, or rights are not being addressed and respected
 - ...An injustice has been done to us or someone else
 - ...Others are trying to dominate or control us
- If we allow our anger to build and/or fester in the car, it can lead to the negative attitudes discussed below

CYNICISM/HOSTILITY/DISGUST/CONTEMPT/ENTITLEMENT/A NEED TO CONTROL (THE NEGATIVE ATTITUDES)

- These are attitudes that consist of:
 - ...A negative mind set;
 - ...A mistrust of other people and their motives; and
 - ...A desire to control a person or situation and/or a desire to “get even” or get revenge
- This mind set leads to brooding about and focusing on others’ real or perceived injustices toward us and what we think we need to do to remedy the situation
- These attitudes also lead to viewing our roadways (and the world around us) as unsafe places, “assuming the worst” when we are driving, and expecting other drivers to:
 - ...Be incompetent and inadequate
 - ...Be inconsiderate, unfair, and untrustworthy
 - ...Go out of their way to try to take advantage of us or to “cross” us in some way
 - ...Set up a situation where they deserve to be punished or retaliated against by us

- These attitudes promote the idea that we are “victims” on the road and need to be:
 - ...Constantly “on guard,” hyper-vigilant, and continually prepared to respond to others’ provocative, dangerous, or irresponsible behaviors
 - ...Ready to defend ourselves and punish others for their transgressions
- These attitudes are best represented by our negative self-talk or rehearsal (what we say to ourselves/our thought language)
 - ...*“Move it of park it grandma”*
 - ...*“Keep pedaling, old man”*
 - ...*“That young buck must think he’s quite the “hot shot”*
 - ...*“The light’s not going to get any greener, buddy”*
 - ...*“That jerk isn’t going to get away with what he just did to me”*
 - ...*“What the hell is the matter with that turkey?”*
 - ...*“I’m gonna get that ‘SOB’ for cutting me off”*
 - ...*“OK, sucker, you’ve invaded my space; now it’s ‘payback time’”*
- When we engage in negative thinking like this, we are continually feeling our stress response and increasing the intensity of and prolonging our anger about what has just happened
- If these attitudes become our way of looking at the world when we are in the car, they then contribute directly to the violation of another driver’s rights and boundaries through the behaviors discussed below

AGGRESSIVE DRIVING ACTIONS (THE PUNISHING BEHAVIORS)

- Aggressive driving actions involve behaviors acted out with the intent to “teach,” hurt, punish, scare, intimidate, control, and dominate other drivers
- They are use as a means of “getting the last word” in a driving duel, gaining revenge and retribution for those real or imagined “wrongs” that we believe the other driver has done to us (or others), or getting our way in a particular situation
- They exist on a continuum from:
 - ...A single gesture, curse, or facial expression
 - ...To repeated exchanges of these actions between two or more drivers, together with increased anger and impaired judgment
 - ...To actively harassing and interfering with the other driver
 - ...Through the use of behaviors like:
 - ...*Staring or glaring at another motorist*
 - ...*Making a visible gesture or “flipping someone off”*
 - ...*Honking our horn*
 - ...*Flashing our bright lights at another car*
 - ...*Tailgating someone*
 - ...*Cutting someone off*
 - ...*Blocking the passing lane by slowing down*
 - ...*Speeding up to keep someone from passing you*
 - ...*Tapping or slamming on our brakes*
 - ...*Chasing or following another vehicle*

...Swerving toward another car

- These behaviors then set the stage for an actual road rage incident

A ROAD RAGE INCIDENT (THE EVENTUAL DESTRUCTIVE OUTCOME)

- A road rage incident occurs when aggressive driving leads to extreme acts of aggressive driving behavior and attempts to intentionally harm the other driver's vehicle or injure the motorist that can lead to property damage or physical injury or death (to others or yourself)
- It represents the end result of an escalating sequence of negative thoughts and aggressive driving actions meted out from one driver to another that literally "takes on a life of its own"
- For example:
 - ...Pulling over the the side of the road or following another driver to a destination to "talk" to that person and then ending up in a "shoving match" or a fistfight
 - ...Forcing someone's car off the road
 - ...Throwing a bottle or can (or something else) at another car
 - ...Bumping into or ramming someone else's car with your vehicle
 - ...Trying to run someone down
 - ...Shooting at another car