

Top 7 Defensive Driving Techniques

While Labor Day weekend marks the unofficial end of summer, there may be many more road trips in your future. So whether you and your family will be in the car for a couple of hours or a couple of minutes, use these defensive driving techniques to stay safe out there.

7 Principles of Defensive Driving

1. **Be aware of your surroundings** – Avoid tunnel vision, making sure to keep track of any pedestrians, bicycles, motorcycles or cars around you. Maintain an awareness of the road in front and behind, as you're susceptible to the ripple effects of traffic events such as rear-endings, collisions and other unexpected road emergencies. Also stay alert to the weather — rainy, snowy, icy, foggy and windy conditions can change from minute to minute.
2. **Anticipate bad moves by other drivers** – Assume other drivers are going to do the wrong thing. For example: turning without signaling, changing lanes into a blind spot, or crossing multiple lanes to make the off-ramp. Most of the time, they won't make the dangerous move, but if they do, you'll be prepared.
3. **Avoid distractions** – Distracted driving comes in [3 flavors](#): visual, manual and cognitive. The first takes your eyes off the road; the second, your hands off the wheel; and the third, your mind off the road. Cellphones, passengers, snacking, daydreaming and GPS controls are common culprits. Before you set off on the road, make sure your phone's tucked away, food's already eaten, and kids are strapped in and occupied. Stay focused on the road while driving and remember you can always pull over if you need to.
4. **Leave yourself an out** – Especially on busy highways, try not to get boxed in by cars on all sides. Always leave yourself an out in case you need to move to safety quickly. For instance, if your tire blows, a deer jumps out in front of you, you encounter debris on the road or the car in front of you collides with another, you may have to change lanes, pull over or reduce speed – fast.
5. **Be seen** – One of the most dangerous places on the road is in another driver's blind spot. Always position yourself where you can be seen. Use your headlights from 30 minutes after sunset until 30 minutes before sunrise, and when posted signs require them. Also know that if your car's color doesn't stand out, other drivers may not see you easily. Position yourself strategically and remember you can always use your horn as a last defense.
6. **Follow the laws** – Control your speed and follow all traffic laws. Knowing [right-of-way](#) rules will keep you safer at every intersection. Maintain safe distances from other vehicles and don't tailgate. Finally, make sure you and your passengers wear seat belts at all times. By following the rules of the road, you can proactively reduce the chances of getting into an accident.

7. **Expect the unexpected** – In the spirit of principle #2, remember that anything can happen at any time on the road. And when it comes to car accidents, it's often the unexpected that's the catalyst for a crash. For this reason, the best offense is defense — and solid defensive driving skills.

You can't control road conditions, weather or random chance, but you can control how you react to all of them. Make safety a matter of habit, and always respect other drivers and the law.

Finally, consider defensive driving courses – either for you or your young driver. No matter the driver's experience level, these courses are designed to help drivers anticipate situations and make safe, well-informed decisions.

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