

# PARENT'S GUIDE

## THE THINGS THEY DIDN'T TELL YOU IN DRIVER EDUCATION

### THE TRUTH ABOUT DEFENSIVE DRIVING

**There is no such thing as an accident!** You must erase from your thinking that crashes are an inevitable part of your life!

Most people believe that learning to drive is a snap because they **equate handling skills with being able to drive a car**. Their concept of defensive driving is using their quick reflexes to dodge other cars. Unfortunately, nothing could be farther from the truth, of the top five causes of crashes none of them can be prevented only by quick reflexes! (you cannot avoid what you don't see).

**The physical skills are the easiest to master** and they are an important part of the driving process because being confident in your ability to control the car allows you the freedom to concentrate on identifying hazards. **The driver who really knows what he is doing can move smoothly through traffic for 5 to 10 years without ever having to skid or swerve to avoid another car**, unfortunately, most people never get to this level.

Experience is important but the lessons can be deadly - the easiest way to do something is to learn to do it correctly the first time. **You don't need years of driving to be a safe driver**. You can become an excellent driver by applying the knowledge and principles taught in class and by practicing the techniques you are learning in the car. You should share this information with your driving coach so that they can help you practice these defensive driving techniques.

### USING YOUR EYES EFFECTIVELY

The key to using your eyes properly is to keep shifting your attention - a minimum of once every two seconds. **The biggest mistake you can make is allowing your attention to fix on the road or the car ahead**. Your brain requires stimulation to stay alert if you do not shift your attention frequently (providing new input) your detection and identification of hazards will vanish and you will begin to daydream - a crash waiting to happen

The effectiveness of your peripheral vision (which is used for detecting moving hazards) is eliminated by concentration and greatly reduced as you increase your speed.

Your central vision is very narrow and is used for selecting your path and identifying the hazards you have detected. **The car will go where you are looking** so it is essential to look far ahead to the center of your lane especially at curves and turns. Looking at the road directly in front of the car is the biggest cause of steering difficulties and the main cause speed control problems in turns.

### SEARCHING AHEAD

**You should be searching at least 1-1/2 blocks ahead** which will give you time needed to deal with any situation before it becomes critical. Your search should be centered on your intended path and your field of view should extend at least 45 degrees to each side.

Since **people see what they are looking for**, you must concentrate on locating and identifying potential hazards. Use the word **T.I.P.S.** (which stands for **Traffic, Intersections, Pedestrians and Signs**) to remember the priority items you should be looking for ahead.

**You should also be systematic in your search**. Follow a pattern - look ahead (1-1/2 blocks), left & right (intersections), ahead (1 block) and behind (mirrors) and then repeat the pattern continuously until the car is parked at your destination.

### INTERSECTIONS

How a driver approaches an intersection is very critical to safety. Most crashes occur at intersections! **Before you start across any intersection you must be able to see at least 45 degrees to each side** - Anything in this zone is a potential hazard. It does not matter if there is a traffic light or a stop sign, it is essential to turn your head and look left & right and if your view is blocked, it is absolutely necessary to slow down while looking left, right & left again until you can see at least 45 degrees on both sides.

**Turning your head is important** because it compensates for the narrowness of your central vision and the reduction in the effectiveness of your peripheral vision due to the increase in speed.

**Reducing speed at a blind or uncontrolled corners is important** because you cannot see what is coming and may need to stop. The slower speeds reduce stopping distance and give you the extra time that is required to look farther to the sides. This also warns any car behind helping prevent a rear-end collision.

## STOP SIGNS

**Most crashes occur at intersections and the number one cause of those incidents is failure to stop completely.** This does not mean zipping through an intersection with reckless abandon it simply means not bringing the vehicle completely to a halt. If the car keeps moving while you are trying to check for traffic your attention is divided between where the car is going and what might be coming. With only a quick look you may miss a rapidly approaching vehicle or it may be hidden behind a tree or bush and the motion of your car may keep the bush between you and the other car until it is too late to do anything but duck.

You are expected to stop in the correct location. Stop signs are located where they are the most visible to the approaching drivers. **The law says nothing about stopping "at the sign" but requires a stop where you can clearly see & judge the cross traffic.** If you come to a line or crosswalk before you can see you must stop there first and then, after you have paused to allow for any pedestrians or traffic in the immediate area, you must still roll slowly forward and make a complete stop where you can clearly see traffic. In this type of situation you have not met the requirement until you have made both stops!

## BRAKING

The number two cause of crashes is the rear end collision. This is probably the easiest type of crash to avoid. **The first key is giving the car behind plenty of warning.** Whether the driver behind you is so close he cannot see ahead or is simply not paying attention to what is going on, he is not going to begin braking until you do and if you don't give him enough warning he will hit you. The closer the car behind you is the more important it becomes to start stopping early. If you always allow extra time and space, when it does become slippery, you will automatically make a smooth, straight stop.

**The second key is your approach to stop signs and traffic lights.** If there is a car ahead of you at the intersection there is no point in getting to the stop sign until it is starting to pull away. You do not want to make more than one stop (unless it's necessary to see) because the less time your car is stopped the less chance you will get hit from behind. If you are approaching a red light neither you nor the driver behind can go through until it is green, thus, if you begin slowing a block away you are not really holding this guy up - you are keeping him from hitting you. It's harder to hit you if you keep moving and if the light changes you won't have to stop.

**The third key is to keep moving in traffic.** You must continuously search at least 1-1/2 blocks ahead for anything that obstructs your lane. For example, if a car ahead is stopped to make a left turn you do not want to have to stop behind him! You must use your search skills to assess the oncoming traffic to determine whether or not the car is going to be able to turn before you have to do more than take your foot off the accelerator. If they will not be able to complete the turn, you must immediately execute a lane change or (if there is only one lane) begin braking.

## FOLLOWING DISTANCE

Closely related to braking and the other side of the rear-end collision problem is tailgating! **It is very easy to fall into the trap of following another car too closely.** Obviously this reduces your time to react and the space needed to stop smoothly (don't forget the car behind you) which is why tailgating is illegal and being less than the required two seconds behind the car in front is totally unacceptable.

**If you are less than four (4) seconds behind the car ahead you are forced to spend most of your time watching and reacting to only that one small part of the traffic scene.** This amount of space is critical in allowing you to not only see around the vehicle in front but to search the necessary 1-1/2 blocks ahead. (try driving with your hand in front of your face) Space ahead gives you the freedom to look away (intersections) and the time to make smooth movements in traffic.

To master this technique in the beginning requires a concentrated effort, however, after you have used it for a while you will notice that you become very uncomfortable anytime you are too close to the car ahead.

**Some situations will require even more space ahead.** Anytime you have a car close behind allow additional room ahead so that both you and the vehicle following can stop smoothly. You should also always try to keep a space open in the next lane, If however, this is not possible you must again increase your space ahead because your only option to deal with any traffic situation would be to slow or stop.

## MIRRORS

It is essential to know where the cars directly behind and in the other lanes are located. It will help you to keep track of them if you check your mirrors after you cross each intersection, and before slowing or changing lanes. This includes moving over to make a right turn, pulling over to the curb to park or pulling out into traffic.

## BLINDSPOTS

**Improper lane changes are the number four cause of crashes.** In addition to checking your mirrors you must check your blindspot anytime you are planning to move the car to the side more than 1/2 a lane. This, of course, means lane changes in traffic, but also includes moving over to make a right turn, pulling over to the curb to park or pulling out into traffic.

## URNS

Anytime you are planning to turn check for signs affecting the turn.( No turn, One way, etc.) Check your mirrors, signal and move into position as soon as practical. - **check your blindspot just before moving over.** Right turns should start from 1/2 way into the parking lane and for left turns you should be right next to the center line. You must look for potential traffic conflicts and pedestrians. Right turns look for traffic from the left and oncoming cars turning left. Left turns are more complex since you are crossing in front of traffic. When you see an opening coming check for pedestrians and **always check again for oncoming cars just before you start to turn.** With either turn you should always check for traffic again 1/2 way through the turn.

## SHOULD I GO OR NOT?

A car at 30 MPH covers a block in 8 -12 seconds It takes 6 seconds to cross an intersection or make a right turn from a stop and up to 9 seconds to make a left turn. The other drivers should not have to slow down to let you into the flow of traffic. Remember anytime you are pulling into traffic or turning the idea is to move efficiently through traffic while keeping space around the car - not see how close you can come without getting hit!

## PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

This is an important decision you have to make - are you just "cramming" for the road test or do you really want to be the best possible driver? **Will your friends be impressed by your smooth, skillful driving or find excuses not to ride with you?** Sports teams practice every day because, even though the athletes are highly skilled professionals, they know that when the pressure is on they will do exactly what they have practiced. When you are under pressure in heavy traffic - how will you react? Will you have practiced the correct skills? Your instructor will show you the proper way - what you do with the information is up to you. **In order for the techniques to become habits you have to make a commitment to learn them and a conscious effort to continuously practice them** - not just when you are in the car with the instructor - but every time you get behind the wheel!