

10 Key Defensive Driving Techniques

You Need To Know

1. Always Be Prepared

When you drive frequently, it's easy to get too casual about it. Since many of your recent driving trips have gone by without incident, it's easy to assume that everything will be fine this time, too.

However, you should never get too relaxed about what it means to be driving a vehicle on the road.

You should always keep both of your hands on the steering wheel, sit up straight rather than slouch, keep your focus on road conditions and other vehicles, and state generally aware.

Being aware in this way can allow you to see hazards from a distance. If you do see a hazard, you can take safe, preventative action to keep your current driving environment safe and avoid a collision. This might mean safely changing lanes, slowing down, or some other action.

2. Stay Focused on Your Driving and the Road

One of the most important defensive driving strategies is to stay focused and avoid becoming distracted. This means you should not use your cell phone or any other type of electronic device while you are driving. To avoid the temptation to do so, put them away.

This also means that you should pull over and rest if you are feeling tired. Driving when you are feeling sleepy can be just as dangerous as driving when you have had too much to drink.

You also want to make sure that you don't start daydreaming or otherwise space out when you're driving. It's also essential that you don't get distracted by whatever is going on inside your car rather than paying attention to the road.

It is easy to become distracted by things you see outside of your car sometimes that isn't related to defensive driving. This might be an accident, something strange happening on the side of the road, or a funny road sign. Instead, you'll want to stay focused and make sure you are able to stay away from other drivers you might be distracted.

Lastly, don't try and multitask when you are driving. This means you shouldn't be putting on makeup, eating, or drinking while you're driving. If you need to do any of these activities, pull over and take a minute to do so while you are not on the road.

3. Always Keep an Eye on Your Surroundings and Scan Far Ahead

If you want to know how to become a better driver, you'll want to learn to not just focus on the car that is right in front of you. Instead, you should be aware of your general surroundings and look further ahead for potential hazards. You should also get in the habit of using your mirrors to keep an eye out for potentially dangerous situations occurring behind you.

4. Always Try to Predict a Possible Risk

Once you have learned to become more aware of your surroundings, you will then want to learn how to predict a risky situation. Then, you will need to have a plan for what type of action, if any, you should take to keep yourself safe from this potential risk.

For example, say that you are driving and you notice a truck on the highway has construction materials in the back that are not tied down well. You should be able to sense that this is a risk and safely distance yourself from the truck. If it seems that the truck could potentially cause harm to other drivers on the road, you'll want to pull over when you reach the next exit in order to report the hazard to the police.

5. Stay Safely Distant From the Vehicles Around You

When you are learning how to become a defensive driver, there is a simple rule to help you understand how far back you should stay from the car in front of you. It is known as the three-second rule. This means that, based on your current speed, there should be at least three seconds of driving time between your vehicle and the vehicle that is in front of yours.

There are a number of situations where you will want to leave even more space than that. These include bad traffic jams, bad road conditions, bad weather conditions, when you are behind a large truck, motorcycle, or bus, or when another vehicle is tailgating you. You also want to make sure that there is enough space between you and vehicles to your side and behind you. To keep a safe distance from vehicles beside you, be sure to drive in the center of your lane. It's also important to understand where the blind spot of other vehicles might be and to avoid driving there.

If you notice that a vehicle is tailgating you, you'll want to switch lanes when it is safe to get away from their vehicle. If you are in a situation where you are unable to switch lanes, you can lightly tap on your brake so that they can become aware that you are about to slow down so they can pass.

In some situations, you might not be able to change lanes or slow down. Or, unfortunately, the driver may continue to tailgate you even if you do either of these things. If this is the case, pull off the road when you find a safe opportunity to do so to allow them to pass you.

6. Don't Drive in the Blind Spot of Another Vehicle

You never want to drive in the blind spot of another vehicle. If other people are not practicing defensive driving skills, they might be distracted, forgetful, tired, or lazy and not check their blind spot before they make a lane change.

7. Don't Expect That Others Will Be Driving Carefully

When you are learning how to become a better driver, it is easy to start assuming that other drivers are also using the same caution and focus that you are applying to the task at hand. However, this is not always going to be the case.

When you are driving, it is important to pay attention to the things that you are able to control. What you can control in the situation is your own driving and not anyone else's. You therefore cannot expect them to use the same defensive driving strategies that you are using.

8. Keep Your Distance From Tired, Bad, or Drunk Drivers

Sometimes when you are on the road you might notice a driver that seems to be driving poorly. Maybe they are driving on the lane marker or center lane, driving too slow or too fast, drifting in and out of the lanes, or tailgating. If you notice drivers like this, it is best to safely distance yourself from them and their vehicle.

9. Stay Away From Potential Road Rage Situations

When you are driving, you might notice a driver that seems upset at your driving. Perhaps they honked at you or are otherwise driving recklessly. It is important in situations like this that you don't engage with a road-rager at all.

This means you should even avoid making eye contact with them. Instead, you should slow down and allow them to drive away from you. It is never a good idea to try and aggravate someone who is obviously already angry, even if you feel like you're in the right.

10. Don't Keep Changing Lanes and Signal to Others When You Are Going to Change Lanes

The risk of getting into an accident will be increased if you are constantly slipping between cars and unnecessarily changing lanes. You should, therefore, avoid doing so unless necessary.

When you do need to change lanes, communicate to other drivers using turn signals, your vehicle's lights, or hand signals. Just like you cannot read the minds of other drivers, they don't know what you are going to do either.

Defensive Driving: It's Worth It!