

Defensive Driving

Defensive driving is defined as operating a car in a way that utilizes safety strategies which enable motorists to see and react to hazards in a cautious manner. Defensive driver strategies are promoted by safe driving schools across the country to reduce the risk of car accidents. These strategies go beyond the standard rules and regulations of the road. They are a mindset that you should adopt to become a safer driver.

What are the 5 rules of defensive driving?

There are lots of strategies that you can use as a driver to practice defensive driving. We'd be here for a while if we covered them all in detail, so we're going to condense everything into 5 major points. These 5 rules of defensive driving are: stay focused, drive slowly at intersections, observe traffic rules, leave a safe following distance, and pay attention to blind spots.

1. Stay focused

Staying focused on the road can help increase the opportunity that you have to react to an oncoming hazard. According to the NHTSA, about 10% of the time that drivers are operating a motor vehicle, they become distracted by their mobile phones. Take a moment to reflect on your driving habits. Do you get distracted by your phone while you're driving? We recommend keeping your phone out of reach, to prevent distracted driving. If you have hands-free software in your car, such as internal navigation, Apple CarPlay, or Android Auto, we recommend utilizing that to view directions instead of using your phone.

Other distractions that you should be aware of include pets, loud music, other passengers, and new technology around your car. One thing that you can do to prevent distractions is familiarize yourself with all the buttons in your car. If you need to adjust things, such as mirrors, air conditioning, or the seat, do your best to adjust before the car starts moving. If something needs to be adjusted after you begin driving, we recommend asking a passenger to make the adjustment.

2. Drive slowly at intersections

Intersections are often considered the most dangerous spots on the road. Since intersections are where vehicles traveling from multiple directions converge, there is a heightened risk of car accidents if you're not careful. We recommend slowing down your speed as you near an intersection.

When you arrive at a complete stop, watch for oncoming cars. Make sure to watch the turn signals of the other cars at the intersection. As you pull out into the intersection, be assertive, but also keep watch for other cars that may be entering into the intersection at an inappropriate time.

3. Observe traffic rules

Observing traffic rules includes being mindful of all road signs. This includes stop signs, speed limits, traffic lights, merge signs, road work signs, and more. By being mindful of these signs, you can properly react to whatever situation lies ahead of you, with plenty of time to do so.

4. Leave a safe following distance

Keeping a safe gap between your car and the one in front of you is crucial in ensuring you have enough time to react when a car stops. You should remain at least ten feet behind the vehicle. Not only will this help you brake easier, but it helps create a buffer between you and the car in front of you if a car in another lane decides to unexpectedly merge. The faster you travel, the more distance you should leave yourself. Applying heavy braking can damage your brakes, shock your passengers, and significantly increase your risk of a fender bender.

On top of maintaining a safe following distance in front of you, you should consider merging into the left lane if cars behind you are not maintaining an appropriate following distance. Of course, this is only if the road signs allow you to merge into the left lane. If not, just be sure to be extra aware.

5. Pay attention to blind spots

Another thing you should be aware of is your blind spots. If you're stopped at a traffic light, or are merging into another lane, make sure to check your blind spots. Failing to check your blind spots, or "half-checking" them are common causes for a car accident. When you're on the highway, what would otherwise be a small car accident on the back roads, has the risk of becoming a much bigger car accident when you don't check your blind spots.

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