



RISKY SOCIAL BEHAVIORS & PEER INFLUENCE

Grades 9-12 | Lesson 6





Lesson Overview

TEEN CRASH RISK increases significantly with each additional teen passenger.

Studies show the risk roughly **DOUBLES** when teen drivers carry two peer passengers and **CONTINUES TO RISE** with additional passengers.



Learning Objectives

BY THE END OF THIS LESSON, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO:

Explain the statistical relationship between teen passengers and increased **CRASH RISK**.

Identify psychological triggers of **ROAD RAGE** and describe effective de-escalation strategies.

Apply refusal and redirection strategies to specific **PEER PRESSURE** scenarios involving unsafe driving.

Assert the **DRIVER'S AUTHORITY** and responsibility over all vehicle operations.

Key Vocabulary

PEER PRESSURE:

Social influence (direct or indirect) that encourages conforming to group behavior, including unsafe driving.

ROAD RAGE:

Aggressive or violent driving behavior stemming from traffic conflict: tailgating, threatening gestures, deliberately dangerous maneuvers.

EMOTIONAL CONTAGION:

One person's emotional state influences others and is a key driver of road rage escalation.

PSYCHOLOGICAL REACTANCE:

The tendency to resist perceived restrictions on freedom, which is why teens often resist adult safety messaging but respond to peer voices.

SOCIAL NORMING:

A persuasion technique that shifts behavior by showing that a desired behavior is what most peers do.

ROAD RAGE

Triggers, Escalation & De-escalation

Road rage rarely starts as rage — it starts as frustration misread as a personal attack.

The safest response to an aggressive driver is **ZERO ENGAGEMENT.**
Every time.



- **TRIGGER:** Drivers misinterpret others' actions as intentional and directed at them personally
- **ANONYMITY OF DRIVING** lowers the social brakes that normally prevent aggression
- **ESCALATION CYCLE:**
Frustration → Perceived Insult → Retaliation → Dangerous Situation
- **ENGAGING** ALWAYS makes it worse. There is no road rage encounter that is improved by responding.
- **DE-ESCALATION:** Don't make eye contact; don't gesture; increase space; let them pass

THE SAFEST

RESPONSE TO AN

AGGRESSIVE DRIVER

IS ZERO ENGAGEMENT.

EVERY TIME.



Refusal Strategies & The Driver's Authority

**You don't need a confrontation to
maintain a safe vehicle.**

You need a plan before you need it.

- **PRE-PLANNED EXCUSES** remove social pressure without confrontation: “My parents check my speed” or “I just got this car.”
- **REFRAME THE SITUATION:** “I need to focus right now, so let's talk when I park.”
- The driver has **LEGAL AUTHORITY** over all occupants, so passengers have no right to override safety decisions.
- If a passenger is actively creating danger, **PULL OVER SAFELY** and address it.
- **PRACTICE THE WORDS** before the moment because it's too late to script a response in real-time.

**THE DRIVER ALWAYS
DECIDES. THAT
AUTHORITY DOESN'T
EVER TRANSFER TO
PASSENGERS.**



Class Discussion

1

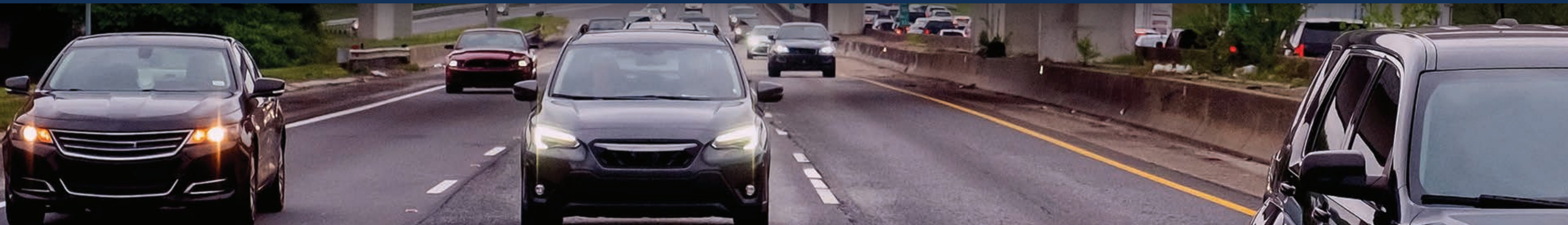
Is it possible to stand up to peer pressure in a car without it feeling like a lecture?

2

When an aggressive driver is tailgating you, what is the hardest part about not reacting?

3

Has being a passenger made you feel unsafe? What did you do and/or wish you had done?



Key Takeaways

- **MORE TEEN PASSENGERS = HIGHER CRASH RISK.**
It's not just distraction — it's social pressure.
- **ROAD RAGE:** The trigger feels personal but rarely is.
Engaging always escalates the problem.
- Have a **PRE-PLANNED RESPONSE** to peer pressure
BEFORE you're in the car with friends.
- The **DRIVER** is in charge of all vehicle safety decisions.



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