

ARE HUMANS BETTER THAN APES WHEN ROAD RAGE STRIKES?

A CONVERSATION WITH DR. JOYCE BROTHERS

Road rage is an increasingly dangerous phenomenon. It's been estimated the number of incidents increases by 7% per year, yet surprisingly there are virtually no statistics to prove any connection with accidents. Are we becoming more aggressive? Are there early signs of this behavior? Are the trigger mechanisms different for men than women? Can road rage be controlled? Dr. Joyce Brothers, an internationally recognized psychologist, answers those questions.

"Road rage has the potential to make tigers out of pussy cats. It's a sudden break in the driver's perception of what's happening, an unjustified overreaction to a situation that in hindsight is a rather small personal space infraction," comments Dr. Brothers. "Man certainly has evolved over the eons, they've gone to the moon, built supercomputers, yet put them behind the wheel, under the right conditions, and they are unable to cope."

"Men and women have different road rage triggers. Men perceive the vehicle as a safe zone, a protection shell that shields them from outside world. Much like an animal protects its domain, violating a personal space sets off something that turns an otherwise normal, nice-guy-next-door person into a tiger. When this happens, men are at the same mental level as an ape—a being who protects his space at all costs and without logical thought as to the consequences."

"Women, on the other hand, have lists. They like order and structure. Off to food shop, pick up dry cleaning, haul children from school to soccer to home. Their lists can be long and over-ambitious. When they start running out of time, their list deteriorates and so does their ability to react logically to potentially dangerous driving situations."

"Road rage can be controlled. Not easily, but by recognizing what sets you off and then considering behavioral alternatives, one can encounter a danger-

ous situation and still remain in control." Dr. Brothers offers a number of suggestions for controlling road rage:

1. Allow plenty of time for your trip. A 12-mile trip at 35 mph takes about 20 minutes. Same trip at 45 mph is 16 minutes. Speeding to save 4 minutes or 2 stop lights isn't worth the added aggravation.



2. Be considerate of others. The Golden Rule (do unto others as you would have them do unto you) is a powerful mental stop-and-reconsider measure.

3. Don't stand on principle. You might be right, but deadly wrong.

4. If the situation gets tense, avoid eye

contact. Apes understand that eye contact leads to confrontation. Learn from them.

MEN: A vehicle is a dangerous weapon. The laws of physics are unforgiving – speed and mass can be lethal.

WOMEN: Keep lists and appointments reasonable. Prioritize your day's schedule, and factor in delays beyond your control.

The Consequences And Cure

How should one handle rage? What are the consequences of letting it all hang out? What do we teach our children about anger, and if we have a terrible temper, do we need professional help? Compare your views with those of some experts:

1. Men and women tend to handle anger in different ways. True False

2. Children should be taught that anger and rage are no-nos and that these are not acceptable feelings. True False

3. In order for people to change their patterns of expressing temper, they need to seek professional help. True False

4. Parents can't, and don't, pass on their anger and aggressive behavior to their children. True False

5. Expressing anger by yelling, or simply letting it all hang out, diminishes it and is generally productive. True False

6. When a young child has a temper tantrum, give him what he/she wants and explain it in detail later. True False

7. Anger never serves a useful purpose. True False

8. Humor is always the best release for anger and the best way to get back at the person causing the rage. True False

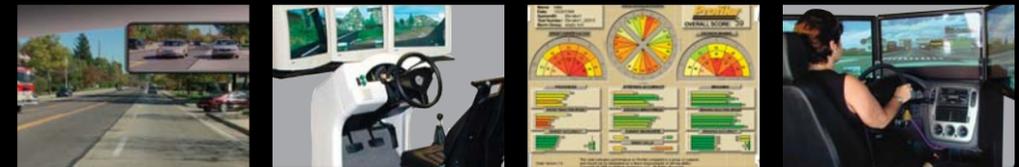
See answers on page 16.

Results? "If you answered six of these eight questions correctly, you're better informed than most on this issue" states Dr. Brothers.

Road rage is easy to detect, easy to prevent, and easy to control. Life is too short to let a moment of anger ruin everything. ■

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