

# Soldier Reintegration: Driving on the Homefront



## Shifting Gears - A Soldier's Return

Soldiers who are returning from Iraq or Afghanistan (OIF/OEF) may bring home some of the driving behaviors that helped keep them alive in combat. In a recent study, when Soldiers who had returned from OIF/OEF were asked about their driving during the first 30 days at home:

- 23% had driven through stop signs
- 50% said they were anxious when other cars approached quickly
- 30% were anxious when driving near objects on road-side
- 20% were anxious during normal driving

### Has Your Soldier...

- \_\_\_ Driven in the middle of the road, straddling lanes?
- \_\_\_ Driven off the road or into oncoming traffic?
- \_\_\_ Chased other drivers?
- \_\_\_ Been told that he/she drives dangerously?
- \_\_\_ Driven through a stop sign or traffic light?
- \_\_\_ Had others refuse to ride with him/her because of the way he/she drives?
- \_\_\_ Appeared uncomfortable or anxious while driving in general?

This brochure suggests simple ways to help your Soldier control post-combat driving behaviors.

## Understanding Carry-Over Driving Behaviors

One Soldier said, "I think the biggest thing that Soldiers have as an issue with family is that they don't understand why we are driving differently."

Soldiers serving in OIF/OEF often spent hours driving on dangerous roads. The driving behaviors that kept them safe there may make them less safe on roads at home.

Common driving events such as being cut off while driving, stoplights or stop signs, traffic jams, roadway trash or loud noises can all cause stress for a returned Soldier.

### How Combat Driving Can Be Carried Over at Home

In Combat	At Home
Drives as far as possible from road edge to avoid IEDs	Drives in middle of road, straddling lanes
Changes direction and lanes unexpectedly, especially at tunnels or underpasses where insurgents might be waiting	Weaves through traffic. Does not signal turns, merges, or lane changes. Avoids or changes lanes at underpasses and tunnels
Always moving. Does not stop for traffic or people. Always has right of way	Anxious when stopped. Rolls through traffic lights and stop signs. Does not yield right of way to other vehicles
Speeds as fast as the lead vehicle in a convoy	Drives over posted speed limit
Hyper-vigilant of road-side elements	Overly attentive to road-side elements

## Combat Driving

A Soldier deployed in Afghanistan recalled, "The streets are not only narrow, but there are hundreds and thousands of people on the streets who won't get out of the way ... you honk and they aren't moving, but you can't stop for fear of getting blown up. You don't want to slow down, but you don't want to run anyone over."

### Addressing Driving Issues

Soldiers indicate that some driving carry-over behaviors and anxieties stop within 12 months – but that is a long time to have these behaviors on the road. Do not wait for change. Help your Soldier make the change that is needed.

One OEF/OIF Soldier suggested, "Just like it was important to learn those driving techniques when you were over there, it's just as important for yourself and your buddy and your family to not use them while you are here."

### Ways to Start the Conversation

An OEF/OIF Soldier said, "Soldiers can't just flip a switch, it takes time to reintegrate." If you have concerns about your Soldier's driving behaviors or anxieties:

- Time your comments and reminders. When possible, do not comment on issues while your Soldier is driving. Talk about them during a quiet time at home.

## Driving on the Homefront



### Ways to Start the Conversation, Cont.

- Remain calm while addressing the issue.
- Do not speak in generalities. Talk about specific behaviors on a specific recent drive.
- Ask for your Soldier's interpretation of what happened on the drive.
- Ask permission to tell the Soldier your interpretation of what happened.
- Ask the Soldier for suggestions and ideas of how to control/reduce the behavior.
- Use available resources for ideas to help reduce the driving behavior or anxiety.
- Create a network of reliable contacts that your Soldier and/or you can contact for ideas and support.

### Some Techniques Used by Soldiers

#### Self-Talk

Some Soldiers feel calmer and more in control if they talk to themselves before or during a stressful driving situation. Speaking out loud helps prepare for the issue and reinforces the plan.

#### Make the Car Comfortable and Relaxing

Many Soldiers find that music helps them control anxiety and even anger. It may be their usual favorite music, but often it is music that they have never really enjoyed, something slower or lighter.

### Strong Visual Cues

A visual cue can remind someone to stay calm or to watch their speed. The cue needs to be something that the Soldier will see while driving, but will not interfere with the Soldier's view of the road. Cues can be easily attached to the steering wheel or visor.

### Resources and Support

A 24/7 Resource for Military Members, Spouses and Families

<http://www.militaryonesource.com>

Wellness resources for the military community

<http://www.afterdeployment.org>

Veteran's Safe Driving Initiative Home

<http://www.safedriving.va.gov/resources/driving.asp>



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### Family & Friends Brochure

## Shifting Gears: Soldiers Returning to Driving on the Homefront

*Suggestions to help  
your Soldier's return to  
driving at home*

