

Post-Combat Driving: The American Road



Self-Assessment

Please take a minute to answer these questions. In the past 30 days have you...

- Driven in the middle of the road straddling lanes?
- Chased other drivers?
- Been told that you drive dangerously?
- Driven through a stop sign or stop light?
- Had a friend/family refuse to ride with you because of the way you drive?
- Been uncomfortable when another car approached quickly or boxed you in?
- Been uncomfortable when driving in general?

If you answered “yes” to one or more of these questions, you might find this brochure helpful.

Every person has a unique response to combat experience, but in a recent study, when asked about their driving during the past 30 days,

- 23% of post-OIF/OEF Soldiers had driven through stop signs
- 50% were anxious when other cars approached quickly
- 20% were anxious during usual driving

If you are having issues when driving, you are not alone. It is a common carry-over from combat driving.

Soldiers' Experiences

In OEF/OIF, driving maneuvers kept you and your unit safe. Back home, those same behaviors make you and your family less safe.

One Soldier said, “I came close to crashing a couple times on my first drive back home. Everyone told me I was a bad driver during that first 30 days when I was back.”

Many Soldiers carry-over combat driving behaviors for 12 months or more. If you or a friend are having these carry-overs, do not wait for change. Make the change you want to see.

Soldier-Recommended Techniques

This brochure suggests simple techniques that Soldiers have used to help control post-combat driving behaviors. Tailor a few to your needs and try them out.

Self-Talk

- Some Soldiers feel more control when they talk to themselves before or during a stressful driving situation. Talking provides a reminder and reinforces a plan.
- Develop a positive statement to remind yourself to keep calm and in control as you drive near trash or parked cars, are stuck in traffic, or are stopped at traffic lights or stop signs.

- If you get anxious in traffic, say something out loud to help control the tension. It could be something like “This is a pain, but we’re all stuck here together. This is nothing compared to what I’ve been through.”

Strong Visual Cues

- Use a strong visual cue as a reminder of a specific goal. For example, use a sign saying “Slow down” to keep in control and watch your speed.
- Place the reminder where you will see it when driving. The dashboard, steering wheel, or visor are good options.
- Make sure that the cue that you choose does not block your view of the road.

Visual Cue Idea



Tape your child's drawing to your steering wheel or dashboard to remind yourself to remain in control when driving

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Make Car Comfortable and Relaxing

Some Soldiers find that music helps them control tension and reduces carry-over of combat driving behaviors. It may be your usual music, but different music - something slower or lighter - can also help.

Pause Before You Act

Take a minute to get your brain and body on the same page. In situations where you are upset, remember that you are in control.

Stop — Think — Act

- **Stop:** When you feel a flare of anger or frustration while driving, pause before acting. This lets you gain control and make sure that you are correctly interpreting the situation.
- **Think:** Make sure that you are responding accurately to the situation. Say what you are thinking out loud. This gives you time to process and a chance to hear your reasoning.
- **Act:** When you are sure that your plan is safe and reasonable, act. If you feel angry and are planning an action that is not safe, such as chasing another car, focus on a plan to gain control.
 - Pull off the road
 - Focus on the visual cue you placed in the car
 - Use controlled breathing to lower your stress and increase control

Controlled Breathing

When you are stressed or angry, pull over and stop the car. Control your breathing to control your anger or frustration.

- Breathe deeply in and out for 2-3 times
- On the last deep breath, exhale slowly
- Once your breathing is under control, imagine a spot just below your navel. Breathe so that your stomach rises. Make each exhale longer than its inhale. As you slow your breath rate, you should feel more in control and relaxed

Resources and Support

Resilience Training: Armor For Your Mind:
www.resilience.army.mil

A 24/7 resource for Service Members, spouses and Families:
www.militaryonesource.com

Wellness resources for the military community:
www.afterdeployment.org

Veteran's Safe Driving Initiative:
www.safedriving.va.gov/resources/driving.asp

Proponency Office for Rehabilitation & Reintegration
Health Policy & Services
Army Medical Department
Office of The Surgeon General
5109 Leesburg Pike, Suite 684
Falls Church, Virginia 22041
703.681.3051
www.armymedicine.army.mil/prr/

A Soldier's Brochure

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*Suggestions to help
returning Soldiers drive
safely at home*

