

Engaging Bystanders to Reduce Aggressive Driving

Why This Project Matters

Traffic crashes are a major public health concern. In the United States (U.S.), approximately 40,000 lives are lost in traffic crashes each year.¹ While many factors contribute to traffic crashes, aggressive driving is a prevalent and concerning risky driving behavior.^{2,3} Strategies to prevent and reduce aggressive driving are needed.



Approach

The Center for Health and Safety Culture conducted key informant interviews with bystanders (friends, partners and spouses, and family members of people who drive aggressively) and developed and tested three steps to help bystanders support their friend or family member to not drive aggressively. Research findings informed the development of a conversation guide that equips bystanders to talk with a friend or family member about their unsafe driving behaviors.

Results

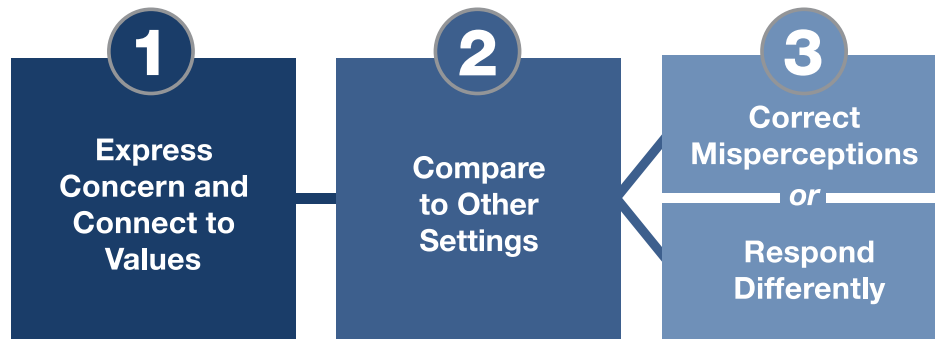
- Key informant interviews with a sample of 16 bystanders (friends, spouses and partners, and family members) increased understanding of their experiences with someone important in their lives driving aggressively.
 - Results revealed that bystanders are well-positioned to intervene to reduce aggressive driving behavior.
 - Bystanders exhibit significant amounts of concern about aggressive driving and feel responsibility to intervene with their friends and family members.
 - Many bystanders have tried repeatedly over time to address their friend's or family member's aggressive driving, attempting different approaches and often persisting despite not seeing much improvement.

¹ National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2025). *Summary of motor vehicle traffic crashes: 2023 data* (Traffic Safety Facts DOT HS 813 762). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

² Finley, K., Hanson, B., Otto, J., & Green, K. (2024). *Understanding aggressive driving and ways to reduce it—Phase 1* (Final Report No. FHWA/MT-24-001/8882-444-23). Montana Department of Transportation. https://www.mdt.mt.gov/other/webdata/external/research/docs/research_proj/tsc/AGGRESSIVE-DRIVING/Final-Report.pdf

³ Steinbach, R., Kasha, A., Svancara, A., & Parker, J. (2025). *Aggressive driving and road rage* (Technical Report). Washington, D.C.: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. <https://aaaafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/202509-AAAFTS-Aggressive-Driving.pdf>

- Bystanders vary in their confidence and their perceived ability to influence their friend's or family member's driving behavior.
- Bystanders also experience barriers to intervening, including not knowing what to say or lacking effective communication skills to address this challenging topic.
- Based on interview findings, three steps were developed to help bystanders have conversations with important others in their lives who drive aggressively.
- The three steps were tested with 102 bystanders. Findings from testing revealed that parents, friends, spouses, and partners can feasibly and effectively interact with their friends and family members to address aggressive driving.



Recommendations and Resources

- Reducing aggressive driving requires multiple strategies and the collaboration of diverse stakeholder groups.
- [*Are You Concerned About Someone's Risky Driving? A Conversation Guide for Friends and Family*](#) shares the three steps that bystanders can use to help their friend or family member drive more safely.
- [*Engaging Bystanders to Reduce Aggressive Driving: A Toolkit for Community Leaders*](#) supports traffic safety stakeholders and community leaders in their efforts to address aggressive driving.

For more information, see the final report: Hanson, B.L., Green, K., MacFarlane, J., Charbonneau, B.Z., Guajardo, K., & Finley, K. (2026). *Understanding aggressive driving and ways to reduce it, Phase 2: Engaging bystanders and developing effective messages*. (Final Report No. FHWA/MT-26-002/8882-444-26). Montana Department of Transportation and Center for Health and Safety Culture. <https://doi.org/10.21949/m4se-g893>

Lead Investigator:

Bridget Hanson, PhD

Email: bridget.hanson@montana.edu

Organization: Montana State University, Center for Health and Safety Culture

Funding Source: Traffic Safety Culture Transportation Pooled Fund TPF-5(444), led by Montana Department of Transportation (MDT)

Project Website: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/projects/trafficsafety-ad.aspx>

This project is made possible by Montana Department of Transportation in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration and the TPF- 5(444) Pooled Fund Sponsoring agencies.

This document is disseminated under the sponsorship of the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) in the interest of information exchange. The State of Montana and the United States assume no liability for the use or misuse of its contents. The contents of this document reflect the views of the authors, who are solely responsible for the facts and accuracy of the data presented herein. The contents do not necessarily reflect the views or official policies of MDT or the USDOT. The State of Montana and the United States do not endorse products of manufacturers. This document does not constitute a standard, specification, policy or regulation.

Alternative accessible formats of this document will be provided on request. Persons who need an alternative format should contact the Office of Civil Rights, Department of Transportation, 2701 Prospect Avenue, PO Box 201001, Helena, MT 59620. Telephone 406-444-5416 or Montana Relay Service at 711.

