

Are You Concerned About Someone's Risky Driving?

A Conversation Guide for
Friends and Family



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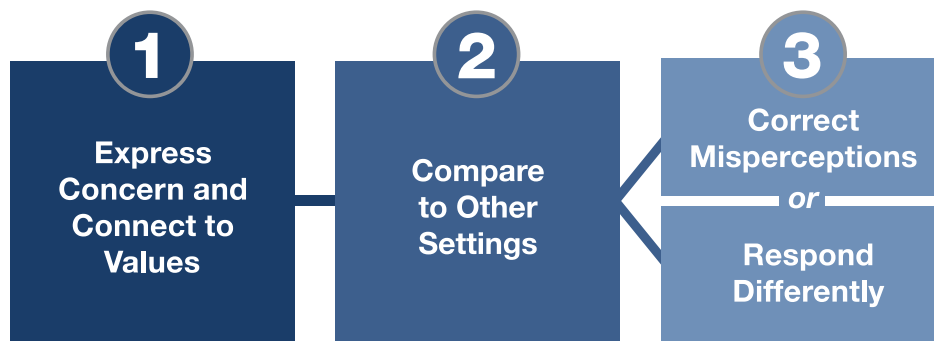
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Introduction

Do you have a friend or family member whose unsafe driving is concerning? They may cut off other vehicles and brake hard, tailgate slower vehicles, or respond to other drivers with rude gestures or excessive honking. This conversation guide is intended to address these kinds of behaviors but can be used for many concerning driving behaviors. This guide will teach you three steps to help you have conversations with your friends and family members about their unsafe driving behaviors.

It's normal to feel unsure or nervous about talking to a friend or family member about their driving. A lot of people feel worried about safety but are not sure what to say or are afraid of hurting the relationship. You're not alone if you feel hesitant to have a conversation or feel like nothing is going to change. But what you do and say matters. Your care, concern, and willingness to speak up are important, even if you get pushback or their driving doesn't change right away. It may not be easy, but a conversation with your friend or family member can make a difference.

In just three steps, you will learn from example conversations and get simple tips to help you talk to someone you care about who drives unsafely.



Throughout the steps, please keep in mind:

- If emotions are running high, wait for a calmer moment to talk.
- If the conversation gets heated, take a break and come back to it later.
- Speak up early. You don't have to wait until a crash or something else bad happens.



When talking with a teen or young adult, these conversations may sound slightly different. Throughout this guide we will provide a box like this for each step that shares examples.

1

Express Concern and Connect to Values

Let your friend or family member know that you are concerned about their safety and focus on what matters to them, their values.

2

Compare to Other Settings

Share with your friend or family member how our behaviors when driving wouldn't be acceptable in other settings, like yelling or cutting in line at a coffee shop.

3

Correct Misperceptions or

Respond Differently

Correct misperceptions if your friend or family member has inaccurate beliefs about their driving, like they are completely in control or that other drivers are the problem and their driving is fine.

Respond differently if your friend or family member reacts strongly to other drivers. Perhaps they think everyone else is a terrible driver or that other drivers are targeting them purposefully.

Step 1. Express Concern and Connect to Values

Start by expressing concern. Especially if this is the first time you are speaking with your friend or family member about their driving behavior or you do not think they are aware of the problem, expressing concern can open a conversation. Let them know you are concerned about their driving behavior and why. This is not about trying to scare them; it is about helping them to critically think about the unintended consequences of their behaviors. These consequences may include harming themselves and others, financial and legal consequences, loss of driving privileges, or other outcomes. Even if you've had a conversation about their driving before, it can be helpful to take a step back and clearly express that you are coming from a place of concern. Try to use "I" statements and describe how you feel.

This might sound like:



USING "I" STATEMENTS

Using "I" statements means expressing your thoughts, feelings, and needs by focusing on your own experience. This communication technique promotes clarity, reduces defensiveness, and helps resolve conflict more constructively.

A basic structure you can use is "I feel [emotion] when [situation or behavior] because [impact or reason]. I would like [need or request]."

"Hey, I noticed you get really tense when driving. Everything okay?"

"I worry about your safety when you drive so fast."

"I know you're a capable driver, and at the same time, I still worry when I see you <insert an unsafe driving behavior they engage in>."

Growing concern motivates change and is an important place to start.

Next, try connecting to what matters most to the person, what they value. Values are at the core of how people see themselves. When you frame the conversation around those values, it can reveal how their current behavior, like unsafe driving, doesn't quite match who they believe themselves to be. By starting with value-aligned language, you help the conversation feel respectful and less critical. Instead of leading with disapproval, you focus on what matters to them, which builds trust and opens the door to change. Take a moment to think about the person in your life whose driving is unsafe. What seems important to them?

Their values could be things like:

- independence/personal freedom
- being responsible
- being a role model
- respecting rules or fairness
- protecting others or caring for family
- contributing to the community

Now that you've thought about what matters most to them, here's how to frame your message in a way that resonates with those values:

If they value protecting others or being a provider for their family, you might connect with that value by saying something like:

"I know you care about keeping your family safe. Driving more calmly can help make sure we all get home."

If they value showing respect for others, you might connect with that value by saying something like:

"Part of how you live your life is treating others with respect, even people you don't know. That includes people you share the road with."



Express Concern and Connect to Values with a Teen or Young Adult

First, connect with them through a personal experience and encourage self-reflection.

"I used to tailgate and swerve around people, but I learned it stressed me out and it never helped me get to where I was going any faster. I have noticed you <insert an unsafe behavior they are engaging in> when you are driving. How does driving like that make you feel?"

Now that you've started the conversation and thought about what drives them, here's how to frame your message in a way that speaks to those values.

If they value protecting others, you might connect with that value by saying something like:

"I know how much you care about taking care of people like your siblings and friends. Safe driving is part of that. You might be fine, but someone else might not be so lucky."

If they value respecting others, you might connect with that value by saying something like:

"I raised you to respect other people and be responsible for your actions. Driving this way isn't respectful and is very risky for others; it reflects on your character. I know you value treating people the way you want to be treated. Do you think your driving behavior aligns with that value?"

Connecting your message to your friend's or family member's values won't guarantee immediate change, but it may help them listen without feeling attacked. It reminds them of who they are and who they want to be. When your concern is grounded in care and your message reflects what matters most to them, it's more likely to be heard. Keep the tone calm and genuine, and don't worry about getting the words perfect. If the message doesn't seem to work the first time or they don't immediately agree to change their driving, that's okay. These conversations are often part of a longer journey. What matters most is that you're showing up with care, respect, and a belief that change is possible.

Step 2. Compare to Other Settings

When we're behind the wheel, it's easy to forget we're still part of a social world. Driving can feel anonymous and fast-paced and, sometimes, that leads to behavior we'd never accept in other settings. Imagine some driving behaviors happening in a grocery store, while walking down the sidewalk, or when waiting in line at a coffee shop. Suddenly, what seems normal in traffic feels... absurd. These comparisons can be powerful. They help reframe unsafe driving by showing how it clashes with everyday social norms and with the values we usually live by.

The following are example messages you can share with your friend or family member. These may not match the exact behaviors they engage in, and that's okay. If they don't quite fit, take a moment to think about the specific behaviors you've seen and try creating your own comparison to a real-life situation they might relate to. A familiar, everyday example can help them see things in a new light.

In a conversation with a friend or family member, this might sound like:

"Imagine if we were in a grocery store and someone was taking a second too long to grab something... would we yell at them to move? It's kind of like laying on your horn."



Keep it Light - Use Humor

This section is meant to spark insight, not guilt.

The goal is to share everyday examples that help your friend or family member see their driving in a new light. Humor can lower defenses and open the door to change. It's not about shaming or scolding; it's about helping them see the disconnect in a way that feels safe, relatable, and even a little funny.



Compare to Other Settings with a Teen or Young Adult

"Imagine if you were at basketball practice and your coach asks you to line up. After lining up, you decide you don't like your spot so you budge your teammates to get to the first spot and then yell at them to move. It's kind of like cutting someone off in traffic and honking at them if they don't move."

By highlighting how certain behaviors would feel out of place in other public settings, you help them recognize that their behaviors while driving aren't just unsafe, it's inconsistent with how they usually act. Sometimes, a simple shift in perspective is all it takes to start a meaningful conversation.

Step 3. Correct Misperceptions or Respond Differently

For the last step, please choose one of the following options as a strategy to try with your friend or family member.

Option A: Correct Misperceptions

Does your friend or family member have misperceptions about their driving, like that they are completely in control or that other drivers are the problem and their driving is fine? Correcting misperceptions means helping your friend or family member understand that what they believe might not be true. It's a way to gently share accurate information so they can see a situation more clearly. Starting by asking open-ended questions can help your friend or family member reflect on their thoughts and behaviors and begin to identify their own misperceptions. Open-ended questions are those that can't be answered with just a 'yes' or 'no' response; they encourage conversation.

Open-ended questions might sound like:

"What do you think you are hoping to accomplish when you <insert an unsafe driving behavior they engage in>?"

"What are some of the things you are thinking about in those situations when you <insert an unsafe driving behavior they engage in>?"

Listen to their response and try to highlight how their misperception reduces safety. Here are examples of how to frame your message and help your friend or family member correct their misperceptions.

They may say something like:

"Other drivers are idiots. I have to drive like this or I'll never get anywhere."

You could respond:

"I totally get the frustration. Driving unsafely doesn't actually get us there faster. It just makes the ride more intense."

Or maybe they say things like:

"You're just scared because you're a nervous passenger."

And you could respond:

"That might be true. But I've also ridden with lots of people, and I only bring it up because I care and want you (and me) to stay safe."



Correct Misperceptions with a Teen or Young Adult

They may say something like:

"I'm just driving like everyone else. It's not a big deal."

You could respond:

"I get that you're just trying to keep up with traffic, and even small things like tailgating or speeding can increase the risk of something going wrong."

Or maybe they say things like:

"I've got it under control. You don't need to worry."

You could respond:

"I trust that you're doing your best. I just want to make sure you feel safe and in control, and I want to keep supporting you however I can."

Option B: Respond Differently

Does your friend or family member react strongly to other drivers? Perhaps they think everyone else is a terrible driver or that other drivers are targeting them purposefully. Responding differently means purposely thinking about a situation in a calmer or more helpful way. Instead of assuming someone did something to be rude or mean, it helps to imagine other reasons, like maybe they made a mistake or are having a bad day. Here are examples of how to frame your message and help your friend or family member respond differently while driving.

They shrug off their road frustration as "normal" but regularly yell or tailgate.

They may say something like:

"Seriously? Learn how to drive!"

You could respond:

"Yeah, that was annoying. I always try to imagine they're lost or distracted; it helps me not to get tense."

Or maybe they may say something like:

"That jerk saw me coming and did it on purpose! I'm completely annoyed."

And you could respond:

"Dude, that was super annoying. And, what if they just made a mistake? I've been trying that 'assume the best' thing lately. It kind of helps."



Respond Differently with a Teen or Young Adult

You notice your adult child often muttering angrily in traffic.

They may say something like:

"That guy is a total idiot."

You could respond:

"Maybe he's rushing to get his kid to daycare. I've had days like that. You're good at not letting stuff like that ruin your drive."

Or maybe they may say something like:

"That jerk saw me coming and did it on purpose!"

You could respond:

"I used to get mad. These days, I try to tell myself they probably didn't see me. It helps me keep my blood pressure down. Just a thought."

It's okay if the option you choose doesn't quite feel right or doesn't make sense for your friend or family member. These conversations can take time. If it doesn't feel natural, or they don't respond well, revisit step 3 and try the other option. The goal isn't to be perfect. It's to be thoughtful, respectful, and persistent in showing you care. You know your friend or family member best; trust yourself to find the message that fits.

A Final Note

Speaking up about unsafe driving isn't always easy, but your voice matters. Whether or not change happens right away, you are making a difference by starting the conversation. You might not always get the response you hope for, and that's okay. Your friend or family member may get defensive, brush off your concerns, or push back. That doesn't mean you shouldn't say anything. Conversations can lead to safer driving.

Tips for Navigating Difficult Conversations

- These conversations are best done when you and your friend or family member are not stressed, upset, or in a rush. You don't have to talk about driving while in the vehicle. Sometimes a little separation from the situation is helpful.
- Be interested and listen without judgment to what your friend or family member has to say. Do not interrupt, argue, or dismiss their perspective.
- Respond by acknowledging your friend's or family member's perspective to let them know you heard them.
- If your friend or family member gets angry or upset, take a break and come back to the conversation at a different time. You could say, "This seems like a hard topic to talk about. Let's take a break and come back to it later."

Here are a few ways to keep the conversation going, even when it gets tough:

- If they **dismiss your concerns** or **get defensive**, you could say:

"I'm not saying you're a bad driver. I just care about your safety and everyone else's too."

"I get that you don't think it's a big deal but imagine if people acted like that walking down the sidewalk. It would feel ridiculous, right?"

- If they **push back**, you could say:

"I'm not saying this to lecture you. I just care about you and want to make sure you're safe."

These kinds of responses can help you stay calm, respectful, and focused on your values even when the conversation is uncomfortable.

Thank you for being willing to speak up. Your care and concern make a difference.

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