

Developing Messages 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} Media messages and campaigns are often used as a strategy to change risky driving behaviors, but little information exists about the effectiveness of or the public's reaction to messages to address aggressive driving.

Approach

The Center for Health and Safety Culture developed and tested media messages to reduce aggressive driving. Messages were developed in three themes – cognitive reappraisal, adaptive response, and prosocial driving – and were tested with national sample of 864 licensed adult drivers who reported recent engagement in aggressive driving. Participants completed two surveys separated by one week. Each participant viewed messages from two of the three themes and provided feedback about their satisfaction with the message and to what extent the message made them think about their driving and motivated them to drive more safely. One week later, participants reported their recall of the messages as well as repeated perception assessments in order to assess changes in perceptions.

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>

Results

Findings indicated that, across message themes, messages were well received, prompted reflection on driving behavior, and supported changes in perceptions related to safety and responsibility.

- Messages were well received, with positive ratings across all themes.
- Over 60% of participants said messages made them think about their driving, and most reported increased motivation to drive safely.
- Participants showed greater concern about their driving and increased consideration of behavior change after seeing the messages.
- Messages also improved perceptions of other drivers, reducing hostile assumptions that contribute to aggressive driving.

Recommendations and Resources

These findings informed the development of [*Guidance for Developing Effective Messages to Address Aggressive Driving*](#), a resource for traffic safety stakeholders to support the development and dissemination of aggressive driving messages.

- Tailor the tone to be supportive and non-judgmental
- Use messaging that promotes reflection rather than instructs immediate behavior change
- Use any of the themes: promote prosocial driving, encourage cognitive reappraisal, and support adaptive responses while driving
- Deliver messages repeatedly across multiple channels
- Pair longer messages with short reminders

The [message guidance](#) provides more details about these recommendations, practical implications, and examples of messages.

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>

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

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