

THE MEDICAL NEWS™

Helping People Get The Healthcare They Need

1-800-MDNEWS1

Northern Virginia

March 2000

Triumph Over “Road Rage”

By Kay F. Walkinshaw, RHA

Call it road rage or aggressive driving or just plain old rudeness; but isn't it simply a buzz word to describe bad behavior?

Motorists are getting meaner and more frightening.

Road rage is a sign of the pressure-packed, stressed and frustration filled lives that affect more and more people.

At the same time, we are seeing less inhibition about expressing negative emotions.

Have we come to accept threatening and violent conduct as an acceptable outlet for anger?

Anger is a normal biological response to stress but there is a difference between anger and violence. Anger can be a good thing. It is a warning signal that something is wrong. It can alert us of danger, energize us to resist or flee. It helps us set limits. It can even energize us to fight injustices.

But when suppressed or improperly expressed, it becomes a reliable indicator that life is out of balance.

Roadrage can be controlled. How we deal with anger is a learned behavior. If mom and dad blew up all the time, it is likely that we will blow



Kay F. Walkinshaw, RHA

up too. If authority figures repressed their anger, it is likely that we will as well.

There is no reason that getting upset, judgmental or cranky should be the norm. Yet many people function automatically on angry autopilot. Forgiveness, empathy, understanding and a get-a-life attitude can become just as automatic if people develop the emotional skill and awareness to allow them to evolve.

The key is to teach yourself to remain calm, under all circumstances and to identify the emotions at the root of your behavior.

Once you have identified and felt the true emotions, then learn how to channel them so you end up with positive results. Example: Someone cuts you off in traffic. The angry you flips them off. The controlled you gently waves and smiles, letting the other driver into your lane. Then you

forget about it. Why stay angry? You can not change that person's behavior. People must hone the emotional skills needed to deal with these issues or they will just continue in life burdened and angry.

Any self-help program which deals with emotional letting-go, assertiveness, handling rejection, and overcoming resentment is going to be uncomfortable at first. But is road rage a better alternative?

Our society is certainly a lot less critical and more willing to tolerate unhealthy anger. People think anger is an automatic reflex response that can not be controlled, and that simply is not true.

The law enforcement programs being developed and implemented in many states indicate recognition of a wide-spread, serious problem. The aim is to crack down on the triggers that can lead to road rage incidents.

These measures will undoubtedly help, but the “buck stops” in our hands. A grass-roots effort, much like the one mothers undertook to stop drinking and driving, would impact this situation also. Let people know, we as a society, will not tolerate this type of behavior. Send a message, “stop it!” “get help!” or “stay off our roads!”