

# A RESOURCE TO REDUCE MULTIPLE RISKY DRIVING BEHAVIORS AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

There is growing recognition that drivers involved in fatal crashes are often engaged in multiple risky behaviors – driving distracted, not wearing a seat belt, speeding, and driving impaired.<sup>1</sup> This resource is intended to help traffic safety stakeholders engage young adults in growing skills and utilizing practical strategies to reduce engagement in multiple risky driving behaviors.



## This resource helps young adults

- learn to identify and regulate their feelings,
- explore cognitions related to multiple risky driving behaviors (speeding, distracted driving, not wearing a seatbelt, and driving under the influence of substances),
- and learn and use behavioral strategies to increase safe driving behaviors.

Most young adults care about creating positive change for themselves, their community, and their state. One positive change that young adults can make that impacts everyone is to reduce risky driving behaviors. This resource will help them make that positive change.

## EXAMPLES OF WAYS TO REACH YOUNG ADULTS TO DISTRIBUTE THIS RESOURCE

- Incorporate into a driving education course.
- Use as educational materials in outreach efforts.
- Distribute to state universities and/or private colleges throughout your state to be shared with students through administrators, wellness offices, and/or professors.
- Partner with local prevention agencies to distribute at events (e.g., health fairs) or as part of awareness activities (e.g., Distracted Driving Awareness Month, National Impaired Driving Prevention Month, etc.).
- Partner with workplaces to distribute this resource to employees.
- Consider adding this resource to your website to make it easily accessible.

## LEARNING TO IDENTIFY AND REGULATE YOUR FEELINGS

The first skill focuses on learning to identify and regulate your feelings. You may be asking yourself, what does identifying my feelings and learning to regulate those feelings have to do with my driving? A lot actually. Studies show having increased social and emotional skills is associated with safer driving. So, by practicing the skills you learn today, you can reduce risky driving behaviors. How cool is that?

As a young adult, you have a lot going on. You may be living on your own for the first time, balancing school, work, a social life, and paying your own expenses (and we know gas, groceries, and rent can cost a lot!). Life can be challenging and figuring it all out doesn't come easy. Sometimes, it can leave you feeling anxious, stressed, or frustrated.

Understanding your feelings is important. Feelings can influence the decisions you make and the actions you take every day. For example, if you feel angry when driving, you might speed, honk your horn at another driver, or decide not to let another driver into traffic in front of you. If you feel happy when driving, you might slow down for the bicycle riding on the shoulder of the road or wait patiently for someone to turn. Understanding how you feel can help you to make different choices about how you behave in any situation, including while driving.



The feelings you have can be experienced differently depending on the situation. Here's an example of how a feeling like frustration might be experienced.



A frustrated feeling might be a **2** out of 10, like when you find out the class you need to take is only offered at 8am. How annoying!



Or it might be a bit stronger, a **5** out of 10, like when you've spent a lot of time on a paper and gotten a lower grade than expected. Ahhhh!



Or, it could be even stronger, an **8** out of 10, like when you find out you need to buy one more textbook for a class – and it is \$120. Your blood starts to boil, and it makes you see red!

Understanding feelings is a skill, and it takes practice. Here's how you can do it.

- Tune in and try to identify your feelings. “Is this a frustrated feeling, or is this a feeling of anger – or maybe I’m scared?”
- Try to describe it.
- “How would I rate the intensity of this feeling on a scale of 1-10?”
- “Does this feeling give me a physical reaction? Is it a sick feeling, like having an upset stomach?”
- “Does it remind me of anything? Is it similar to how I felt when I lost my keys the other day?”

How you feel about something can impact what you do, but you can change your feelings in any situation and at any time (even before you are in the situation). Learning to change how you feel is a skill and takes practice. Here's how you can do it.

- **You can change how you think.**
  - If you are feeling overwhelmed, instead of thinking about all the homework you need to get done, you could think about how much you are learning and enjoying the class.
- **You can change what you do.**
  - If you are feeling stressed, instead of sitting home and ruminating on what is bothering you, you could go for a walk and breathe some fresh air. Fresh air and body movement help clear your head.
  - If you are feeling annoyed by your roommate interrupting your study time (even with your headphones on!), take a few deep breaths.



## RISKY DRIVING BEHAVIORS

Risky driving behaviors include speeding and aggressive driving, distracted driving, not wearing a seat belt, and driving under the influence of substances. To help you grow skills to reduce each of these risky driving behaviors, we provide:

- brief information about the risky driving behavior, and
- strategies that you can choose from to help you reduce each risky driving behavior.

### Aggressive Driving and Speeding

You might be wondering what exactly aggressive driving is. Aggressive driving is considered any unsafe driving behavior that a person does on purpose that is intended to be negative. Those include behaviors like tailgating someone, not yielding (when you probably should), preventing other drivers from passing, running stop signs, yelling or honking, and cutting off other drivers in traffic on purpose. Aggressive driving is considered a leading cause of traffic crashes, and some research suggests that aggressive driving may be a cause in approximately 56% of crashes where someone dies.<sup>2</sup>

Did you know that speeding is a major factor in traffic crashes? In 2019 alone, speeding was involved in approximately one-third of all traffic fatalities.<sup>3</sup>



Here are some strategies that you can choose from that can support you not speeding when you drive:

- I will monitor my speed especially when I am feeling anxious and/or upset.
- I will check on my speed when I see a speed limit sign.
- I will choose to not speed when I drive with others in the vehicle.
- I will choose to not speed when I am driving in dangerous weather conditions like rain, snow, or ice.
- I will choose to not speed when I am driving on the interstate.

Pick one of these strategies to try over the next several weeks. See how it works. Adjust if needed. You got this!

## Distracted Driving

Distracted driving can occur when you are holding and talking on your cell phone, reading a text or email on your cell phone, or manually typing or sending a text message or email. In addition to using your cell phone while driving, you can also be distracted by reaching for an object while your vehicle is in motion. These behaviors take your attention away from the road and can lead to devastating consequences. Did you know, most drivers your age don't typically read a text or an email or send a text or an email on their phone when they are driving?<sup>4</sup> Even though most people don't do things that can distract them while driving, in 2020, there were still 3,142 people who died in a distraction-related crash.<sup>4</sup> There is a lot to pay attention to while driving. Since we text so often, it can feel easy and like it doesn't interfere with our ability to concentrate. But distracted driving is dangerous – texting while driving more than doubles your odds of being in a crash.



Here are some strategies that you can choose from that can support you not driving distracted when you drive:

- I will put my phone away and out of reach before I start driving.
- I will turn my phone off before I start driving.
- I will set my phone to “Do Not Disturb” before I start driving.
- I will choose to not use my cell phone when I am driving at high speeds.
- I will choose to not use my cell phone when I am driving in dangerous weather conditions like rain, snow, or ice.
- I will choose to hand my phone to a passenger to manage my phone (read and respond to texts, use a map, etc.). This way I won't miss any important calls, texts, or emails.
- I will choose to only look at my phone when I am stopped.



Pick one of these strategies to try over the next several weeks. See how it works. Adjust if needed. You got this!

## Seat Belt Use

Did you know most fatal crashes happen within 25 miles from home? That's close! Your favorite local restaurant or coffee shop, your classes, and your work are probably within that close radius.<sup>5</sup> Did you also know over half (51%) of the people killed in a traffic crash in 2020 were not wearing their seat belt?<sup>6</sup> Wearing a seat belt can save your life. And it's easy, kind of like putting on your shoes or brushing your teeth. Most drivers your age always wear a seat belt. And, in almost all states, wearing a seat belt is a law. Spend a minute and reflect on the people who care about you like your parents and your friends. Consider wearing a seat belt for them.



Here are some strategies that you can choose from that can support you in wearing a seat belt all the time.

- I will put my seat belt on before starting my car.
- I will ask others in my car to wear their seat belt.
- I will choose to wear my seat belt when I drive with friends in the vehicle.
- I will choose to wear my seat belt when I am driving in dangerous weather conditions like rain, snow, or ice.
- I will choose to wear my seat belt when I am driving at a high speed.

Pick one of these strategies to try over the next several weeks. See how it works. Adjust if needed. You got this!





## Driving Under the Influence of Substances

Most drivers your age don't drive after drinking alcohol<sup>6</sup> and don't drive within one hour of using marijuana.<sup>7</sup> It's illegal to drive under the influence of alcohol and/or marijuana, and the penalties are high with some fines as much as \$10,000. Those fines don't include court fees, attorney fees, treatment fees, and increases in your insurance. And your driver's license might be suspended. It is estimated that 56% of drivers involved in serious injury and fatal crashes tested positive for at least one substance.<sup>8</sup>



Here are some strategies that you can choose from that can support you in not driving under the influence of substances.

- I will plan for alternative transportation in advance of drinking alcohol or using marijuana.
- I will go out with a designated driver.
- I will choose to set a reminder to call a taxi or schedule a ride share (e.g., Uber, Lyft, etc.) when drinking alcohol or using marijuana.
- I will choose not to drink alcohol or use marijuana when I will be driving with others in the vehicle.
- I will choose not to drink alcohol or use marijuana when I will be driving in dangerous weather conditions like rain, snow, or ice.
- I will choose not to drink alcohol or use marijuana when I will be driving on the interstate.

Pick one of these strategies to try over the next several weeks. See how it works. Adjust if needed. You got this!

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup>National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). (2020). *Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS)*. Retrieved from <https://www.nhtsa.gov/research-data/fatality-analysis-reporting-system-fars>.

<sup>2</sup>AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. (2021, October). 2020 Traffic Safety Culture Index. Retrieved from <https://aaafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/2020-Traffic-Safety-Culture-Index-October-2021.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. (2022). *Speeding*. Retrieved from <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/speeding>

<sup>4</sup>Steward, T., (2022, March). *Overview of motor vehicle crashes in 2020* (Report No. DOT HS 813 266). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

<sup>5</sup>National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. (2022). *Seat belts*. Retrieved from <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/seat-belts>

<sup>6</sup>AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. (2021). *2020 Traffic Safety Culture Index* (Technical Report). Washington, D.C.: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

<sup>7</sup>American College Health Association. (2022). *National College Health Assessment: Spring 2022 reference group data report*. [https://www.acha.org/documents/ncha/NCHA-III\\_SPRING\\_2022\\_REFERENCE\\_GROUP\\_DATA\\_REPORT.pdf](https://www.acha.org/documents/ncha/NCHA-III_SPRING_2022_REFERENCE_GROUP_DATA_REPORT.pdf)

<sup>8</sup>Office of Behavioral Safety Research. (2021, June). *Update to special reports on traffic safety during the COVID-19 public health emergency: Fourth quarter data* (Report No. DOT HS 813 135). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.





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**Recommended Citation:** Finley, K., Hanson, B., and Green, K. (2024). *A resource to reduce multiple risky driving behaviors among young adults*. Bozeman, MT: Center for Health and Safety Culture, Montana State University