

Emotions

What are emotions?

Emotions are more than just feelings. Emotions trigger biological (heart-rate, respiration, blood pressure), physical (movement, activity, fight, flight) and psychological (stress, anxiety, joy) responses that are principally concerned with survival.

As humans we may have a conscious awareness of an emotion, or number of emotions, but not always. There are times we react to an emotional stimulus, but we don't know why.

Emotions are generally positive or negative, and measured in terms on intensity. Sometimes our emotional responses are useful, adequate and appropriate; sometimes not.

Emotions and the brain

When we receive a message from our senses, the signals go directly to the amygdala, an ancient part of the brain responsible managing emotions. The amygdala triggers immediate, survival-based messages that our bodies respond to automatically without thought.

At the same time, sensory inputs travel to several other (newer) parts of the brain. In particular, messages go to the prefrontal cortex where the information is analysed and decisions can be made. This process is more complex, and takes longer. It's at the heart of the old saying, "Think before acting".

Emotions and safety

It's important learn what triggers our emotions, and the behaviours, that might conflict with our long term safety needs. Here are some common triggers, emotions, and behaviours:

- Someone apparently hogging the right lane; anger - tailgating, drive too close
- Someone apparently cuts you off; revenge - retaliate or abuse
- Someone apparently fails to give way; contempt - menace or intimidate
- Someone passes you; competitive - race or speed to get ahead

Driving with emotional intelligence

Drivers can reflect on the personal triggers that promote an unwanted emotional response in traffic. With practise, and over time, drivers can learn to predict those triggers and use proven strategies to stay calm, and not yield to ancient, perhaps inappropriate responses. The 4-Ways Driver Training Model© includes these strategies and helps participants reduce emotion-driven risk taking behaviour.



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