

Driving Your Spouse Crazy -- Literally

How to Drive Peacefully with your Spouse and
Help Improve Your Marriage



By Laurie Israel, Attorney/Mediator

The Driving Problem

What is it called?

Backseat driving?

A microcosm of your marriage?

All conflict situations give you and your spouse information to be mined.

Thinking about the issues underneath the conflict helps the marriage (and makes driving much more pleasant.

Read the tea leaves.

Deconstruct the problem.

The Driving Problem

What are other typical problems
that cause a lot of marital conflict?

Learning to address the driving issues can help the rest of the marriage.



Driving Raises Basic Issues

- Driving raises basic issues about control, acknowledgment.
- Driving relates to values and capabilities that play out in marriages.
- Driving raises issues of respect (and lack of respect).



Here are some of the common issues that arise on **the road**, how they relate to **marriage**, and some thoughts about how to **think about them**.



What is the Best Route To Take?

- She tells him to go on the highway and across town.
- He takes a supposed shortcut that takes them straight into a traffic jam.
- She says, “I told you so.”



What is the Best Route To Take?

Analysis:

- In a marriage, spouses often have different ways of doing things.
- This is a typical “control” problem, rampant in marriages.
- Usually, which way to do it is not that important because both choices will lead to an acceptable result.
- In the car, there is less patience.
- Sub-optimal decisions are made because there isn't time to discuss, and both partners are trapped in an enclosed space.



What is the Best Route To Take?

Conclusions:

- It's almost never really important if you take the longer route.
- And you may see something unexpected.
- If it had been "your" way, it could have been "worse", who knows?



Changing Lanes

- Your spouse is about to change lanes to exit but doesn't look through the side window.
- You see the car next to you speeding up.
- You shout, "Watch out!"
- Your spouse pulls back but misses the turn and you're stuck until the next exit.



Changing Lanes

Analysis:

- Most spouses resent being put in danger by the other spouse.
- Back seat driving is actually good – 2 eyes are better than one.
- Deal with the missed turn off constructively – you were trying to help.
- But when driving in a car going 65 mph, the reality is that you're both in danger all the time.



Changing Lanes

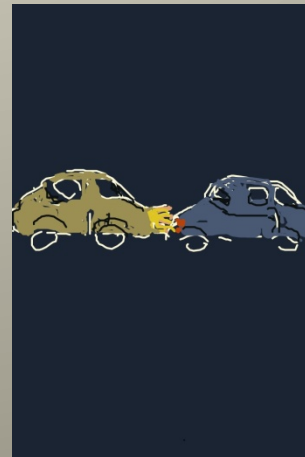
Conclusions:

- There is a 99% chance that your spouse would have seen the car in time even if you hadn't shouted. (OK, maybe a 97% chance.)
- And if you do crash, you get to bring it up for the next 10 years.



Tailgating

- You are driving in slow traffic.
- Your spouse doesn't like the speed at which the car in front of you is driving
- Your spouse tries to speed them up by driving near their back fender.
- Your front bumper looks like it's attached to the car in front.
- You are getting very nervous and angry.



Tailgating

Analysis:

- Anger and frustration are part of being human.
- We need to understand that our spouse may have different anger points than we do.
- As married people, we need to respect and tolerate our differences, and even appreciate them.



Tailgating

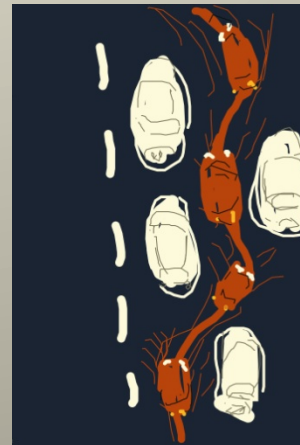
Conclusions:

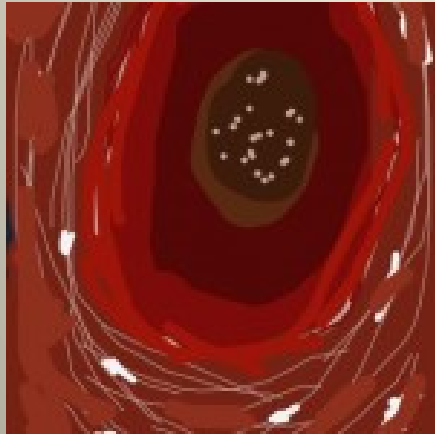
- If the tailgating is genuinely dangerous, you should bring it up calmly.
- It probably is inherently dangerous, so how to you bring it up?
- If your spouse doesn't change their behavior, continue to bring it up again, but stay calm.



Driving Aggressively

- Your spouse is changing lanes, passing cars, and seems very frustrated to be contained by traffic.
- This is unusual (or usual) driving behavior for your spouse.
- You are getting increasingly uncomfortable and fearful.





Driving Aggressively

Analysis:

- Most married couples have a sense when their significant other is troubled by something.
- Your instincts will usually be right about this.
- Or if this type of driving is usual, what then?

Driving Aggressively

Conclusions:

- Ask your spouse openly if something is bothering them.
- Don't give them a hard time about the aggressive driving.
- If your spouse can talk about it, their aggressive driving will probably stop.
- But if this is their usual behavior, best to talk about it with your spouse when you're not in the car.



Signaling Every Turn

- You are driving on a deserted side street.
- There is no one behind you.
- You don't bother to signal, but your spouse says, "Put the left signal on!"
- You get angry because it seems silly to signal when no one can see it.



Signaling Every Turn

Analysis:

- People in relationships have some different values.
- For one, following the rules may be very important.
- You should appreciate that your spouse has stricter standards of behavior.
- This may actually be a good quality overall.
- Accidents do occur through failure to signal or incorrect signaling.

Signaling Every Turn

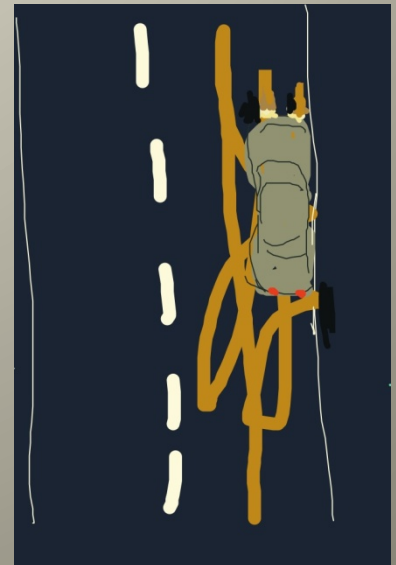
Conclusions:

- If it does you no harm, and makes your spouse happy, why not use the signal?
- In marriage, gestures towards a spouse's happiness are always a good thing.



Parallel Parking

- You learned to drive in a big city.
- Parallel parking was part of your life.
- However, your spouse came from a rural area and needs 50 open yards to successfully parallel park a car.
- It's frustrating and annoying because you can do it so much better.
- It's very hard to stay quiet while your spouse struggles with the parallel parking.



Parallel Parking

Analysis:

- Marriage is affected by each person's different cultural, religious, geographic, and economic background.
- By appreciating and absorbing elements of their different background, you can become a better person.



Parallel Parking

Conclusions:

- Appreciate the unique qualities of your spouse on each of their 10 attempts to parallel park.
- Don't tell them you can do it better.
- Remember, your spouse is better at plenty of other things than you are.



Backing Up the Car

- Your spouse zooms backward out of the driveway with great energy.
- You are petrified.
- Luckily no cars are coming.



Backing Up the Car

Analysis:

- Sometimes you just have to trust your spouse to do the right thing.
- While your spouse may not always make the right decision, overall your spouse has good judgment.



Backing Up the Car

Conclusions:

- Be rational.
- When was the last time your spouse had an accident?
- Was it a major accident?
- Assume your spouse knows what your spouse is doing.
- Your spouse is just as interested in protecting your lives and your car as you are.



About the Presenter:

Laurie Israel is an attorney, mediator and collaborative lawyer practicing in Brookline, Massachusetts. Her years of divorce law and divorce mediation practice led her to examine why marriages fail and how marriages can be improved. By using mediation techniques to help married couples, she's become one of the leaders in a movement known as marital mediation. She is a frequent presenter at conferences, and has published extensively on her websites about Marital Mediation . Her websites are: www.ivkdlaw.com, www.maritalmediation.com, www.mediationtostaymarried.com and www.yourfamilymatterslawblog.com. She is a writer (blogger) on The Huffington Post, writing about marriage, divorce, relationships, collaborative law and mediation. She writes frequently for www.mediate.com . Her articles are posted on her websites.

