

New Drivers: What to Know During a Traffic Stop



A Key Guide to Help You Stay Safe, Calm and Prepared



Traffic stops are the most common interaction between police officers and the public—but they are also one of the most unpredictable and potentially dangerous situations for law enforcement.

➔ **A traffic stop is never routine. In the moments before approaching a vehicle, an officer is quickly assessing many unknowns:**

- What is the violation?
- Who is in the car?
- How many people are inside?
- What is the driver's demeanor?
- Are there weapons in the vehicle?

At the same time, new drivers may feel nervous, unsure of what to do, or afraid of making a mistake. This guide exists to help bridge that gap. Understanding what officers are thinking - and knowing what is expected of you - can help keep everyone safe and make the interaction smoother and less stressful.

➔ **Key Takeaways for New Drivers**

- Traffic stops are one of the most common police-public interactions.
- They can also be one of the most dangerous situations for officers due to unknown factors.
- Your actions during a stop can help reduce stress and risk for both you and the officer.

➔ **What to Do When You Are Pulled Over**

- If you see flashing lights behind you:
- Pull over to the right side of the road in a safe location as soon as possible.
 - If needed, you may pull into a nearby parking lot or side street.
 - Take a deep breath and do not panic.

Once stopped:

- Shift the vehicle into park.
- Turn off any music.
- Roll down your window.
- At night, turn on your interior light.
- Keep your hands visible at all times (on the steering wheel is best).

Important:

- Do not reach under the seat or into compartments unless directed.
- Do not exit the vehicle unless instructed by the officer.
- Do not hand over documents until they are requested.

As the officer approaches your vehicle:

- Remain calm, cooperative, and respectful.
- Answer questions honestly.
- Follow all directions given by the officer.
- Respond clearly – a simple “yes” or “no” answers are best when appropriate.
- Inform the officer immediately if you have a firearm and do not reach for it under any circumstances.

➔ **What the Officer May Ask For**

Be prepared to provide:

- Driver's license
- Vehicle registration
- Proof of insurance

Having these ready helps keep the stop efficient and safe.

➔ **If You See a Traffic Stop While Driving**

- If there are two lanes, move over to the left if it is safe to do so.
- Slow down and stay alert.
- Do not stop, even if you know the driver.
- Avoid distractions or rubbernecking, which can cause secondary crashes.

➔ **Possible Outcomes of a Traffic Stop**

- A verbal or written warning
- An infraction
- A misdemeanor summons
- Arrest or being placed in custody
- A vehicle tow
- Issuance of a racial profiling card

The outcome depends on the situation, behavior, and violation—not on whether a driver argues or becomes confrontational.

➔ **What to Do If You Are In a Crash**

If you are involved in a crash:

- Remain calm and avoid confrontation with the other driver.
- Do not try to determine who is at fault—officers handle citations and violations.
- Understand that rules may differ on private property vs. public roadways.
- If the vehicle can be moved safely, pull to the right side of the road.
- If it is safe, remain in your vehicle until instructed otherwise.

What Did You Learn?

- **1. True or False: A traffic stop is considered a routine situation for police officers.**
A. True
B. False
- **2. What should you do first when you see police lights behind you?**
A. Stop immediately in the lane
B. Speed up to find a better spot
C. Pull over safely to the right
D. Exit the vehicle
- **3. Where should your hands be during a traffic stop?**
A. In your lap
B. Searching for documents
C. On the steering wheel and visible
D. Anywhere
- **4. Should you hand the officer your documents before they ask?**
A. Yes
B. No
- **5. If you have a registered firearm in the vehicle, what should you do?**
A. Reach for it slowly
B. Hide it
C. Inform the officer and do not reach for it
D. Exit the vehicle
- **6. True or False: If you know the driver being stopped, you should pull over to check on them.**
A. True
B. False

Answer Key:
False, C, C, B, C, False

Notes:

Remember!

Knowing what to do during a traffic stop helps protect you, your passengers, and the officer involved. Staying calm, prepared, and respectful can make a stressful moment safer for everyone.

Prepared drivers make safer roads.



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