Space Cushion Driving
- Space – Helps to avoid trouble and adjust to changing traffic conditions
- Visibility – Ample visibility helps buy time when things go wrong
- Rely on “Skill Not Luck”
- Don’t allow the mistakes of others to impact you or your family
- 100% Attention – *Never allow yourself to be distracted while driving*

Space and Visibility are the two principle concepts behind defensive driving. Keeping these two concepts in mind will help avoid being involved in an accident. Defensive driving is a positive approach to protect yourself from the inconsistent and unsafe actions of other motorists. The National Safety Council reports, that on an average, one out of every four drivers is involved in an official reportable accident every year. Most drivers rob themselves of good perception by following the vehicle ahead too closely. Good drivers reduce speed and provide a safe following distance to provide better visibility. This in turn assures there is room to stop, slow or turn.

Most drivers rate themselves as very good drivers, yet there seems to be more bad drivers than good drivers on the road. Have each person rate themselves as a driver on a scale from 1-10. Ask who has been involved in a vehicular accident and the circumstances that led to the collision. Cover the following concepts to uncover the techniques that may have helped prevent the accident.

**Key Concepts**
- Aim High in Steering
- Get the Big Picture
- Keep your Eyes Moving
- Leave Yourself an Out
- Make Sure They See You

**Aim High in Steering**
- This technique helps the driver see what lies ahead in all three zones.
- Action Zone – 4-6 seconds in front of the vehicle
- Seeing Zone – 12-15 seconds in front of the vehicle
- Planning Zone – 30-120 seconds in front of the vehicle
- A good driver will focus on what is happening in each zone and make the appropriate decisions as conditions change in each one. Avoid focusing on only one section. Shift your focus into each zone on a recurring basis.

**Distractions** – Distractions lead to many accidents so drivers should not allow themselves to take their minds off the task at hand – Driving!
- Route Problems – Not knowing where you’re going and needing to look at maps or street addresses
- Mental Distractions – Things on your mind – work, home, events, etc. lead to loss of concentration
- Scenery – Looking at people, buildings, hills, or anything that catches your attention
- In Car Distractions – Radio, CD’s, kids, phones, food, etc. all require you to shift your hands or focus and not place 100% attention on driving
- Unfamiliar Driving Tasks – Driving an unfamiliar vehicle, towing a trailer, driving somewhere new can all shift some focus away from the road ahead
• **Get the Big Picture**
  - Analyze information on all 6 sides of the vehicle
  - Establish Visibility and Maintain Space
  - Create a “Bubble” around your vehicle and attempt to maintain it
  - Always allow for about 4 seconds of following distance – increase it as conditions deteriorate
  - Braking distance going 60 MPH is approximately 400 feet
  - Understand the hazards you see, plan a defense, act early and always advise others of your intentions
  - Check your mirrors constantly
  - Hills and Curves - look deep into curves and at the crest of hills. Anticipate other vehicles being in your lane – reduce speed accordingly

• **Keep Your Eyes Moving**
  - Move your eyes to a different zone or part of the road every 2 seconds
  - Scan from side to side
  - Check your mirrors every 5-8 seconds
  - Intersections are the most dangerous part of the road and where most collisions occur
  - Clear all intersections scanning left-right-left and continue to clear as you proceed through

• **Leave Yourself an Out**
  - Maintain your “Bubble” when possible – Remember Space and Visibility
  - Always have somewhere to go in the event of an emergency.
  - Always expect the unexpected and be prepared to react by driving defensively

• **Make Sure They See You**
  - Communicate with other drivers, pedestrians, children, animals and other road users
  - Use your horn (where appropriate), lights and turn signals
  - Slow down in residential areas, parking lots and roads where cars line the street
  - Attempt to gain eye contact with other users of the road
  - Use turn signals well in advance – never assume a vehicle with its turn signal on is going to turn - only assume that the light is working!
  - Always be aware of the intentions of oncoming traffic

Studies have shown that people’s level of alertness changes dramatically with the hour of the day. Below is a graph that shows the level of alertness for particular times of the day. Included on the graph are several catastrophic events directly tied to people’s level of alertness.
Fatigue Related Human Error and Circadian Time of Day

Suggested SIPE Safety Videos:
14-1 Room to Live – Seconds to Live (30 minutes)
14-2 Low Visibility & Driving (15 minutes)
224 Traffic Safety (8 minutes)
239 Vehicle Safety (10 minutes)
242 Driving Safety (10 minutes)