

Keeping Calm: Who's Driving the Car?

Module Reader # 2



Imagine that your emotions are like a car. You're just driving along, minding your own business, when someone "crashes" into you—emotionally or physically. Maybe they snatch a paper off your desk. Or call you a name. Or make fun of your clothes.

What do you do?

If you "crash" right back into them, it will probably make things worse. A fight might break out, or more name-calling and gossip. You could both end up in the principal's office—or worse, in a police station. So that doesn't work. But what can you do?

Think about a stoplight: red light, yellow light, green light.

Red light: Stop!

- First, tell yourself to stop. Don't react right away. Perhaps your heart is racing, your fist is itching to throw a punch, or your mouth wants to say something rude. But stop first. Stay at that stoplight for a minute or two to calm down.

Yellow light: Slow!

- Tell yourself to keep calm. Your body's "fight or flight" reflex wants to strike back or run away to safety. But your brain *can* take control over your body.
- Take two or three deep breaths. If you slow your breathing, your body will relax and you can think more clearly.
- Recognize that you are angry. Try to understand what is beneath your anger—"Why do I feel angry about this? How does the other person's action make me feel?"

Green light: Go!

- Once you've calmed down, think about the best way to respond. How do you usually respond when this kind of event occurs? Is that the best way to respond? What are the consequences, positive and negative? Should you talk the situation over or get advice from a friend?
- Congratulate yourself for keeping control!

Remember the red light—yellow light—green light steps. Remember that you are driving the car. You are in control, not someone else. You can choose how to respond. Nobody "makes" you respond in a certain way.