

You're driving down the road and suddenly there is a squad behind you with its lights flashing. As you pull to the side of the road, your stress level climbs and you may wonder what to do next. An encounter with the police is likely to cause a person stress due to the possibility of a citation or arrest. To the officer, this traffic stop also represents a stressful event due to the danger inherent in traffic stops. The officer has no way of knowing who you are or how you will react during the traffic stop. To ensure a safe interaction for both you and the officer we offer the following encouragements:

1. Be civil to the officer - The officer who pulled you over is simply doing his or her job. Officers are expected to be civil to the people they meet and our interactions will be much more pleasant for everyone involved if all parties are civil to each other.
2. Remain inside your vehicle - The safest place for you on the side of the road is within your vehicle. Your vehicle protects you from passing cars. While you may be intending to save the officer some steps or just want to greet the officer, from the officer's perspective, exiting the vehicle provides a person with a greater ability to act aggressively and/or pose a threat. Wait for the officer to make contact with you at your vehicle. The officer may approach either the driver's side or passenger side of your vehicle depending upon the traffic conditions.
3. Keep your hands in plain sight - Officers are trained to watch people's hands because hands are the tools people use to harm others. Keeping your hands visible conveys to the officer that you are not a threat. At night, turning your interior lights on will further assist the officer in seeing where your hands are.
4. Avoid reaching toward or into areas of the vehicle - People carry many important documents that are needed on a traffic stop. Your driver's license may be in your pocket or purse and your insurance card might be in your glove box. People that would intend to harm officers may also be hiding weapons in these same places. To ensure the safety of everyone at the traffic stop, only reach for items when requested by the officer. When accessing the requested item, do so slowly.
5. Be patient - Expect that the officer will need to return to the patrol vehicle and perform some routine checks to determine the most appropriate outcome of the traffic stop. Remain in your vehicle until the officer returns.
6. Avoid arguing with the officer - The side of the road is not the place to debate your guilt or whether the officer acted appropriately. If you believe you are not guilty of the offense for which you were cited or arrested, you have the option of appearing in court and arguing your case before a judge. If you believe that the officer acted inappropriately, you are encouraged to contact the officer's agency and speak to the officer's supervisor. Many agencies, including the Benton County Sheriff's Office, have either squad car based cameras or body-worn cameras that capture video and audio of an entire incident. Speaking with a supervisor about your concerns is the surest and safest way to address the behavior in question.

7. Use care when leaving the traffic stop - Once the officer tells you that you are free to leave, use your turn signal and re-enter the traffic lane with care. The last thing any officer wants is to see you involved in a collision following a traffic stop.

We realize that traffic stops are rarely the high point of anyone's day. Society has made laws that regulate conduct to ensure the safety of everyone. We, in law enforcement, are simply charged with ensuring these rules are obeyed. Because traffic stops carry with them an inherent risk to the officer, you should expect the officer to be courteous but alert for anything that may indicate trouble. If you find yourself in a situation where an officer is giving you loud and clear commands, you need to understand that you have done something to indicate danger to the officer. Should you ever find yourself in this position, stop what you are doing, listen carefully to the officer, and follow the officer's commands. Once the situation has been stabilized, you and the officer may engage once again in a conversation. Our goal on every traffic stop is to ensure the law is followed and everyone leaves the encounter safely. Hopefully, all your encounters with officers will be of the non-enforcement variety. Should you find yourself on a traffic stop, we hope you'll put these encouragements into practice to make the situation more pleasant for all involved.

For more crime prevention information and safety information visit the Benton County Sheriff's Office website at: <https://www.co.benton.mn.us/211/Crime-Prevention>. You can also like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @BentonMNSheriff for regular updates and crime prevention messages.