

When Stopped By the Police, Top Things to Remember

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In the thought-provoking movie *Crash* an African-American couple was pulled over by the police and the complexities of racial tolerance surfaced once more. Night after night, we watch the news and see stories like the NYC police officers that shot and killed an unarmed man on the day of his wedding. Most police officers protect and serve the public with professionalism and pride. In fact, any use of force among police is relatively rare, occurring in less than 1% of all police contacts, but excessive use of force has been found to occur in up to 35% of all encounters that involved any force.

What should you do if the police stop you in your car? You should remember the following:

- When police signal you to stop, slow down, pull over and if possible, pull over in a public location with plenty of light
- Keep your hands clearly visible, where the police can see them
- Present your license, registration and insurance card, if requested
- You have the right not to consent to a search of your vehicle, but if the police have probable cause to believe that you have been involved in a crime or that you have evidence of a crime in your car, your car can be searched without your consent
- Do not interfere with a search of your vehicle, but clearly state that you do not consent and request grounds for the search
- Officers may separate passengers and drivers from each other to question them and compare their answers, but no one has to answer any questions
- If you are given a ticket, take it, you can always challenge it in court
- If you are suspected of drunk driving and refuse a sobriety test, the police may arrest you or seize your driver's license

The NAACP real world guide to interacting with law enforcement titled, *the 411 on the Five-O*, provides additional tips if you encounter the police: On the Street, In Your Home, If You Are Arrested and the Do's and Don'ts If You Are Approached by the Police.

If you feel that a police officer has mistreated you, you can seek legal advice and file a complaint through your state or local police department and governing agencies. In addition, organizations like the NAACP and ACLU provide additional insight and assistance.

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