



# The 3PM Playbook, 2026\*

A practical guide to navigating  
Australia's riskiest hour on the road.



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# Project 3PM set out to better understand what happens during Australia's afternoon window.

This document, The 3PM Playbook, combines insights from a Youi study of more than 2,000 Australian drivers, with practical advice from Road Sense Australia that might help alleviate the pressure of the afternoon rush.

55%

of Australians say that driving at 3pm is more stressful than any other time of day.



# Why 3PM?

For millions of Australians, 3pm isn't just another time of day. It's when parents are heading to school pick-up. Workers are rushing to meetings or home. Tradies are travelling between jobs. And everyday Aussies are trying to fit appointments, errands and after-school activities into an already busy afternoon.



According to 2025 Youi Wrapped data, 3pm was recorded as the single worst hour of the day for car incidents on Australian roads.

It's no surprise that Project 3PM found:

**55%**

say driving at 3pm is more stressful than any other time of day.

**48%**

drive between 2pm and 5pm three or more weekdays each week.

**24%**

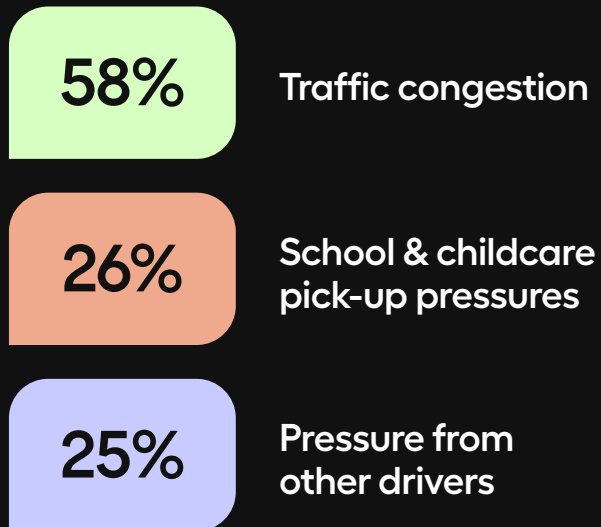
in the past year have experienced a road incident around 3pm.

# What's causing the stress?

At first glance, it looks like a traffic problem. But the research suggests driver behaviour may change when people feel under time pressure.

A melting pot of work, family and household responsibilities, all competing for mental space while you're on the road. No wonder so many Australians are feeling the 3pm crunch.

## Top 3pm stressors



## Followed by:



# Running late changes everything

The moment drivers start running behind schedule, the research suggests driver behaviour may change when people feel under time pressure.

62%

of Australians admit they engage in risky driving behaviours when they're running late.

What happens when we feel rushed?

28%

Become impatient with other drivers

20%

Change lanes more frequently

19%

Accelerate through amber lights

18%

Exceed the speed limit

Running Late



Stress



Distraction



Risky decisions



# The Blind Spot

Perhaps the most surprising finding from Project 3PM wasn't what Australians do on the road, but what they think about their driving.

84%

rate their own driving as safe.

42%

say other drivers are safe.

Everybody thinks they're the good driver... and everybody thinks someone else is the problem.

But if pressure, fatigue and distraction affect us, there's a good chance they're affecting other drivers too. Safer afternoons begin with recognising our own behaviours may be shared among other drivers too.



# Who is more affected by the afternoon rush?

While anyone can feel different pressures on the road at 3pm, some Australians experience it more often than others. From the Project 3PM data, here are some key groups more affected by the afternoon rush.

## Parents & caregivers

Balancing school pick-ups, childcare and family commitments.

65% drive every or most weekdays at 3pm.

## Daily 3pm drivers

People navigating the afternoon rush almost every day experience the highest levels of fatigue, work pressure and time pressure.

30% often or very often feel mentally drained or unable to fully concentrate at 3pm.

## Millennials & Gen Z

The most frequent afternoon drivers (67% of Gen Zs and 61% of Millennials) and among the most likely to partake in risky behaviours when running late.

27% of Gen Zs and 24% of Millennials say they change lanes more frequently when running late.

## High-income earners (\$150k+)

Juggling the highest concentration of work and family commitments.

Only 17% say they have plenty of flexibility in their afternoons.

Across every at-risk group, running late consistently emerged as the factor most strongly associated with changes in behaviour behind the wheel.

The 3PM Playbook

# PLAN. PREPARE. PAUSE.

Road Sense Australia's driving safety advice can be boiled down into three simple habits.

43%

of Australians report feeling mentally drained, tired or unable to fully concentrate at 3pm at least some of the time.





## The 3PM Playbook

# PLAN.

### Reduce pressure before it reaches the driver's seat.

Many of the frustrations Australians experience at 3pm begin before the journey even starts. Building a few extra minutes into your afternoon can help reduce the likelihood of feeling rushed, distracted or impatient on the road.

### Before you leave:

- ✓ Allow buffer time between commitments
- ✓ Leave earlier where possible
- ✓ Build buffer time into pick-ups and appointments
- ✓ Plan your route before departing
- ✓ Avoid back-to-back commitments

Ask yourself:

**“If this trip takes 10 minutes longer than expected, will I still be okay?”**

If the answer is no, you're already stepping into the car under pressure.

# PREPARE.

## Set yourself up for a distraction-free drive.

We know that when 3pm rolls around, Australian's are already carrying a mental load. Work messages, family logistics, navigation, passengers and a growing to-do-list all compete for attention before the car even starts moving.

Preparing your vehicle and your mindset before setting off can help reduce the distractions that often accompany a busy afternoon.

## Before you change gears to drive:

- ✓ Enter your destination into navigation before moving
- ✓ Answer any urgent texts and calls before driving
- ✓ Put your phone out of reach and silence unnecessary notifications
- ✓ Make sure children, passengers and belongings are secure
- ✓ Set up music, podcasts or climate controls before departing

Ask yourself:

**“What can I take care of now so I don’t need to think about it while driving?”**

The fewer decisions you need to make on the road, the more attention you can keep on what’s happening around you.

# PAUSE.

## Pressure, fatigue and frustration often travel with us.

More than four in ten Australians report feeling mentally drained, tired or unable to fully concentrate at 3pm at least some of the time. When we're rushed or distracted, small mistakes can quickly become risky decisions.

Before you pull away, take 30 seconds to check in with yourself.

## Ask yourself:

- ✓ Am I feeling rushed?
- ✓ Am I thinking about work, family or my next commitment?
- ✓ Am I tired or mentally drained?
- ✓ Am I feeling frustrated or impatient?
- ✓ Would taking a few deep breaths help me reset?

Take a moment to check your state of mind.

A safer approach to the 3pm journey may begin before the engine starts.

A short pause won't make traffic disappear, but taking 30 seconds to reset before driving can help stop the mental load from influencing the decisions you make once you're on the road.

*(Based on guidance from Road Sense Australia's driving safety recommendations.)*

# The team effort

Safer roads are a team effort.

Australians overwhelmingly believe drivers have a responsibility to improve safety at 3pm. But they don't believe drivers can solve the problem alone.

## Who Australians say has a role to play

51%

Drivers

34%

Local councils

31%

State governments

28%

Schools and childcare providers

## What can we all do to help improve the 3pm pinch?

### Drivers

Allow more time and reduce distractions.

### Schools and childcare providers

Improve pick-up and drop-off traffic management.

### Governments and councils

Invest in safer school-zone infrastructure, traffic management and road safety initiatives, including school-zone speed enforcement programs and safer school precinct road measures.

### Communities and families

Coordinate pick-ups, carpool where possible and minimise unnecessary pressure during the afternoon rush.

# One hour. Millions of to do lists

**The 3pm rush may never disappear.**

School bells will keep ringing, calendars will stay full and booked, and families will continue balancing work, home and everything in between.

But understanding what makes 3pm such a pressure point is a helpful step towards making Australian roads safer.

The findings suggest that, for many drivers, mental load may play as significant a role as traffic congestion during the afternoon rush.

And the most important road safety decisions can happen before the engine starts.





## LEARN MORE

**Project 3PM by Youi** to explore the research and interactive findings.

## VISIT

**Road Sense Australia** for practical road safety advice and resources.

## DOWNLOAD

**Youi Car Accident Checklist** so you can be prepared if the unexpected happens.



\* This is a well-intended, safety awareness-based research guide and is not legal advice or an actual law.

#### Disclaimer

This data is sourced from a survey conducted by Ideally between 4 August 2026 and 5 August 2026, involving 2,334 drivers aged 18 and above from all states and territories within Australia. Some percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number. Survey results have not been independently verified by Youi and may not be representative of the general population. Youi makes no representation or warranty of any kind of the accuracy, adequacy, reliability, or completeness of the data and accepts no liability for any loss or damage of any kind suffered as a result of the use of or reliance on the data. Individual experiences may vary.

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