What to do right after a vehicle collision

Immediate steps after a collision

A vehicle collision is unsettling, even when it is minor. Knowing what to do in the first minutes can protect your safety, preserve your legal position, and make the repair process smoother. The checklist below covers the essential actions, from the moment you stop the car through to arranging repairs. Each step includes a short reason so you understand why it matters.

1. Check for injuries and move to safety

Your first priority is the well-being of everyone involved. Before you inspect the car or exchange details, check yourself and your passengers for any injuries. If anyone is hurt, call emergency services immediately. If the vehicles can be moved and it is safe to do so, pull them to the side of the road or a nearby parking area. Leaving the cars in a travel lane increases the risk of a secondary collision. If the cars cannot move, turn on your hazard lights and stay inside the vehicle with your seatbelt fastened until help arrives.

2. Call the police

Even in a minor fender bender, a police report creates an official record of the incident. Officers will document the scene, collect statements, and note any visible damage. That report becomes a key piece of evidence for your insurance claim and for any dispute about fault. Do not rely on a verbal agreement with the other driver; circumstances and memories can change later. Wait for the officer to arrive before you leave the scene.

3. Exchange information with the other driver

While you wait for the police, exchange details with the other driver. You need their full name, phone number, insurance company and policy number, driver's license number, and the license plate of their vehicle. Also note the make, model, and color of their car. Do not discuss fault or make statements about what happened beyond the factual exchange of information. Anything you say can be used by the other party's insurer or in court.

View the location on Google Maps

4. Document the scene thoroughly

Photographs and notes are your best defense against disputes. Use your phone to take wide shots of the entire scene from multiple angles, close-ups of the damage to both vehicles, the positions of the cars relative to road markings and traffic signs, and any visible debris or skid marks. Also photograph the other driver's license plate and insurance card. Write down the

time, date, weather conditions, and road conditions. If there were witnesses, ask for their contact information as well.



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5. Notify your insurance company

Call your insurer as soon as you are in a safe place, even if you are not sure you will file a claim. Many policies require you to report any accident within a specific window, and early notification preserves your options. The insurer will open a claim file, assign a claim number, and tell you what they need from you. Provide them with the police report number and the other driver's insurance information. They will also explain your coverage for rental cars, towing, and repairs.

What to expect during the repair process

Once the immediate steps are handled, the focus shifts to getting your vehicle repaired. The process can feel overwhelming if you are not familiar with body shop procedures, but knowing what to expect helps you ask the right questions and avoid surprises.

Getting an accurate damage estimate

The first step after the insurance claim is to obtain a damage estimate. An adjuster from your insurance company will inspect the vehicle and provide a preliminary figure. You can also take the car to a repair shop for a separate estimate. A thorough estimate lists each damaged part, the labor required, and the cost of replacement parts. It should note whether the shop plans to use original equipment manufacturer (OEM) parts or aftermarket components. OEM parts are made by the vehicle's original manufacturer and tend to fit and perform exactly as the originals did. Aftermarket parts can be cheaper but may vary in quality. Your insurance policy may specify which type is covered, so check with your adjuster before authorizing work.

Paint matching and panel alignment

Color matching is one of the most visible aspects of a quality repair. A skilled technician blends the new paint to match the surrounding panels, accounting for fading that the original paint has undergone over time. Without proper paint matching, the repaired area can look like a patch. Panel alignment is equally important. After a collision, body panels may shift out of position, creating uneven gaps that affect the car's appearance and aerodynamics. A good body shop uses precision measuring tools to restore factory alignment.



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Frame inspection and safety systems

Modern vehicles are built with crumple zones and structural members designed to absorb impact energy. After a collision, the frame must be inspected to confirm it has not been bent or weakened. A frame inspection typically involves measuring key reference points against the manufacturer's specifications. If the frame is damaged, it must be straightened or replaced to restore the vehicle's crashworthiness. Safety systems such as airbags, seatbelt tensioners, and sensors also need checking. Airbags deploy once and must be replaced with new units. Seatbelt pretensioners may need resetting. Some vehicles have advanced driver-assistance systems (ADAS) that require recalibration after a collision. Ask your repair shop whether they include ADAS calibration in their standard process.

Repair warranty and workmanship

A reputable shop stands behind its work with a written warranty. The warranty should cover both the parts used and the labor for a set period. Typical warranties range from one year to as long as the vehicle is owned, depending on the shop and the parts. Before you approve the repair, ask what is covered, how long the coverage lasts, and whether the warranty transfers to a new owner if you sell the car. A shop that hesitates to put its guarantee in writing may not be the best choice for a long-term fix.

Choosing a collision repair provider

Not all body shops are the same, and your choice can affect the quality, timeline, and cost of the repair. Start by checking whether the shop has experience with your vehicle's make and model. A shop that works regularly on your brand will be familiar with its construction, common weak points, and the proper repair procedures. For owners of Hyundai vehicles, McFarland Hyundai in North Hampton provides a full-service body shop on-site. That means the technicians have direct access to factory specifications and genuine parts from the manufacturer. They can also coordinate with the dealership's service center if any mechanical issues are discovered during the repair.

McFarland Hyundai is also on YouTube.

Ask about the shop's certification. Shops that are certified by the manufacturer or by industry organizations like the Inter-Industry Conference on Auto Collision Repair (I-CAR) follow standardized repair protocols. Certification indicates that the shop's technicians receive ongoing training and use up-to-date equipment. Also ask about the expected timeline. A simple repair might take a few days, while a complex frame or structural repair can take several weeks. A good shop will give you a realistic estimate and keep you informed if delays arise.



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Final practical reminders

Keep a copy of the police report, your insurance claim documents, and the repair estimate in a safe place. You may need them later if there is a dispute or if you sell the vehicle. If you have a loan on the car, your lender may require proof that the repairs were completed and paid for. Once the work is finished, inspect the vehicle carefully before you drive away. Check the paint match in different lighting, open and close all doors and the trunk, and test the lights, horn, and dashboard indicators. If anything looks or feels off, speak up before you sign the final release.

For drivers in the North Hampton, Portsmouth, and southern Maine area who need collision repair on a Hyundai, **McFarland Hyundai** offers a full-service body shop backed by factory parts and trained technicians. The dealership is located at 177 Lafayette Rd, North Hampton, NH 03862, USA. You can reach them by phone at +1 603-964-8771 to discuss your repair needs, schedule an estimate, or ask about their warranty terms.