

When you live, work, hike, recreate or camp in bear country, the best strategy is to avoid an encounter with a bear or other wildlife in the first place. Here are the best ways to do that:

- **CARRY BEAR SPRAY** – know how to use it
- **GO IN A GROUP** – 4 or more is best
- **MAKE NOISE** - talk, laugh, whistle, sing, sound an air horn or whistle, etc
- **KEEP YOUR DOG ON A LEASH** – or leave it at home
- **PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR SURROUNDINGS** - learn & look for signs of bear activity and bear foods
- **MINIMIZE ODOURS** - pack food & garbage in air tight plastic containers
- **NO ATTRACTANTS OUTSIDE AT HOME** – if you don't want a bear in your yard then don't feed it
 - **Garbage** - in bear-proof containers, otherwise, store indoors (basement, garage, or sturdy shed)
 - **Bird Seed & Humming Bird Feeders** - do not set out from April to October
 - **Pet Food** – feed pets indoors and store pet food indoors
 - **BBQ** - clean after each use and empty the grease cup - store in garage or sturdy building.
 - **Fruit & Berry Producing Trees & Shrubs** - plant ornamentals that are not fruit bearing, otherwise, pick as soon as fruit is ripe and store indoors
 - **Garden** – place it out in the open with good lines of sight - harvest asap - erect electric fence
 - **Compost** - erect electric fence, otherwise, don't add fruit, kitchen waste, meat, dairy, oils or eggs
 - **Other attractants** – things like pop cans, juice bottles & other recycling; fuel, jerry cans, motor oil, antifreeze; insect repellent, air freshener, scented candles, etc - in bear-proof containers, otherwise, store indoors
 - **Bee Hives, Chickens, other small animals** - erect electric fence around hives, coops & enclosures
 - **Livestock** - promptly remove any deadstock to a rendering plant or practice on-farm carcass composting (viable even in winter)
 - **Cereal Crops** - be cautious when working or walking in fields at dusk and dawn – store in well constructed granaries with sturdy doors - clean up spilled grain as soon as possible - erect electric fence

IF YOU DO SEE A BEAR - stop and remain calm

- Don't panic, don't run, don't scream, don't throw things at the bear, don't drop food
- Keep everyone in your group together
- Don't go closer to the bear – not even to get a photograph

IF THE BEAR HASN'T SEEN YOU - do not draw attention to yourself

- Back away slowly while keeping your eyes on the bear
- Quickly and quietly go back the way you came

No encounter – both human and bear are safe.

IF THE BEAR HAS SEEN YOU - assess the situation and the bear's behaviour:

- Continue to remain calm
- Get your bear spray out of its holster, remove the safety clip and be ready to spray if the bear approaches
- Don't appear threatening to the bear – don't make eye contact with the bear - don't run, don't shout, don't throw things at the bear
- Talk to the bear in a calm and quiet voice so it knows you are a human – you could make yourself look bigger to the bear by raising your arms or spreading out the sides of your jacket
- Back away slowly, increasing your distance from the bear while keeping your eyes on the bear
- Quickly and quietly go back the way you came while allowing the bear an escape route

A bear will likely have run away by this point and the encounter is over - both human and bear are safe. When you encounter a bear at home, you have the added option of retreating to the safety of your house, garage or vehicle.

IN THE RARE INSTANCE WHERE A BEAR FOLLOWS OR APPROACHES CLOSER - continue to remain calm but now determine if the bear's behavior is defensive or non-defensive.

Your bear spray should still be in your hands and ready to spray.

Bears use a lot of body language and vocalizations with each other to signal their mood, levels of stress or anxiety, and dominance or submission. Humans need to learn to speak a bit of bear so we can respond appropriately in an encounter.

Defensive Bear Behaviour:

- The bear perceives you as a threat to itself, its young, or its food source
 - It is agitated, paws the ground, yawns, vocalizes, jaw pops, salivates or may bluff charge
- A grizzly bear sow defending her cubs is a prime example of defensive behaviour

IF A DEFENSIVE BEAR FOLLOWS OR APPROACHES CLOSER:

- Be submissive - continue to appear non-threatening, talk calmly but quietly
- Continue to back away, increasing your distance from the bear – leave the bear an escape route
- Use your bear spray if bear approaches within 20 ft and aim for the face – bear spray is very potent and, if deployed properly, the bear will stop its approach and/or turn away
- If you cannot deploy your bear spray and a defensive bear makes physical contact with you then this is the **ONLY TIME YOU WOULD LIE DOWN & PLAY DEAD**. This is the ultimate act of submission:
 - Lie face down with your hands behind your head to protect your neck
 - Keep your backpack on as further protection
 - Spread your legs so that the bear cannot roll you over easily - if rolled over, get face down again as quickly as possible
 - Don't cry out as this may prolong the attack
 - Remain still and wait for the bear to leave

Non-defensive or Predatory Bear Behaviour:

- The bear is curious, looking for food or exerting dominance
- It is calm, quiet, and focused on you - it does not exhibit any of the above signs of stress or fear
- A curious bear may become predatory

IF A NON-DEFENSIVE OR PREDATORY BEAR FOLLOWS OR APPROACHES CLOSER - continue to remain calm but now stand your ground:

- **DO NOT PLAY DEAD!**
- Act aggressively because this bear may be looking at you as prey - stomp your feet, wave your arms or jacket or branches, shout, use your noise maker, throw rocks or branches, etc at the bear
- Continue to back away from the bear – leave the bear an escape route
- Use your bear spray when the bear approaches within 20 ft and aim for the face
- If this bear makes physical contact with you, fight for your life with whatever you have - concentrate on attacking the sensitive parts of the bear's face

To help avoid panic and confusion when you see a bear or a cougar or during an encounter with one, discuss various scenarios with your family, friends, co-workers, hunting buddies, etc and determine how everyone should react – who steps forward first with their bear spray, who steps up next if the bear spray fails to deploy or misses the animal, who gathers up the kids, etc. Do rehearsals before you go outdoors.

Make your home and property an unpleasant place for a bear to be – make loud noises to scare the bear away, yell, honk the car horn, bang pots & pans together, sound an air horn or loud piercing whistle, set off bear bangers, etc. Do not place yourself in danger by doing any of these things.

If you have a shelter where your kids wait for the school bus, place it well away from the forest edge with good lines of sight so they can look around to check for bears – do the same all along your driveway. Kids can carry and/or sound an air horn or whistle when they walk. They should take a good look around for bears before they step off the bus when they arrive home. Teach your kids about how to react should they encounter a bear or cougar.

Resources

Download and read the Alberta BearSmart Safety Guide:

<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/595754dd-31f9-4417-973c-237775ec6615/resource/01eff3c4-4893-4cbd-8a82-a7fbc5a8cae9/download/bearsmart-bear-safety-booklet-2019.pdf>

For tips on how to use bear spray, view the Alberta Environment & Parks video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDgBY2PbnO4&list=PL11233C0B2B01B061&index=1>