



## **Safety in Bear Country Society**

**Main Messages of the Video**  
**STAYING SAFE IN BEAR COUNTRY**  
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### **Part 1: Bear's Characteristics, Behavior and Society**

#### **Mind of Bears**

Bears are intelligent.

Curious

Individuals

More predictable than most people think.

#### **Physical Traits**

Amazing noses and ears and eyes are good.

Strong and fast, good swimmers.

Black bears are great at tree climbing, but grizzlies are not bad.

#### **Black versus Grizzly Bear**

Grizzly distribution more limited but locally can be the most abundant.

Grizzlies more likely to attack when threatened.

Black bears rarely attack defensively.

Grizzlies more dangerous than blacks, but risks from either much less than people tend to fear.

Humans are more tolerant of black bears.

#### **Bear Society**

Flexible social structure that allows bears to function at low densities or at concentrated food sources with reduced chance of injury.

Bears do fight but more often use avoidance, restraint, and posturing to prevent injury.

#### **Major Aspects of Bear Society**

Body language and vocalizations to communicate with each other

Dominance hierarchy or pecking order

Personal space

#### **Bear's Motivations**

Bears have varying motivations for what they do.

Food and the search for it dominate a bear's life

Mating and raising offspring

Investigating novel stimuli; curiosity  
Establishing and asserting dominance

From a safety standpoint it's important to understand the difference between "defensive" and other motivations, especially ones that might lead to "predatory" attack.  
It is also important to understand the psychology of bears as they grow up. There's a big difference in the mentality of a recently weaned 2 to 4 year old bear versus an adult female with cubs or an adult male.

## **Part 2: Bear–Human Interactions**

Most bears have previous experience around people and learn from each interaction.  
Humans usually don't even know they came close to a bear; **Bears usually avoid people.**  
Two major categories of bear-human interactions where bears don't avoid or even approach people: Defensive and Non-defensive.

### **Defensive Interactions**

Bear thinks you are a threat to itself, its cubs or its food.  
Usually you approached it and entered into its personal space, surprising or crowding it.  
Most likely will appear agitated and stressed.  
Closer you are too it before it becomes aware of you, more likely it is to react defensively.  
Almost always stop short of contact, fight/flight is triggered.  
Defensive response that results in an attack (physical contact) almost always involve grizzly bears surprised at close range, on a carcass or protecting young. The few defensive attacks by black bears have been females protecting cubs (but these are very rare).

### **Non-Defensive Interactions**

A number of different non-defensive motivations that may appear similar to each other:

- Curious bear
- Human-habituated bear
- Food-conditioned bear
- Dominance-testing bear
- Predatory bear

### **Avoiding Bear Encounters or Reacting During One**

Avoid bears whenever possible

Let bears you cannot avoid know you are human by talking and slowly waving your arms. Try to give the bear your scent

Avoid bears that aware of you and unconcerned

Never approach a bear

Leave area you encountered a bear

If you hear vocalizations or see unattended cubs be extremely cautious and leave the area silently the way you came.

### **Review of your response during bear encounters:**

- Identify yourself as human to bears you cannot avoid by talking and slowly waving your arms. Try to give the bear your scent.
- Increase your distance from the bear, even if it appears unconcerned.
- Do not run, it could invite pursuit.

**If a bear approaches you:**

- Stand your ground!
- Quickly assess the situation. Is the bear behaving defensively or in some other way?
- Remain calm, attacks are rare.
- Do not run unless you're absolutely sure of reaching safety.
- Group together. Prepare your deterrent

**If the bear is approaching in a defensive manner:**

- Stand your ground. Try to appear non-threatening.
- Don't shout at the bear. Talk to the bear in a calm voice.
- If the bear stops its approach, increase your distance.
- If the bear resumes its approach, stand your ground, keep talking calmly, and prepare to use your deterrent.
- If the bear cannot be deterred and is intent on attack, fall to the ground as close to contact as possible and play dead.
- When the attack stops, remain still and wait for the bear to leave. If an attack is prolonged or the bear starts eating, you it is no longer being defensive.

**If the bear approaches in a non-defensive manner:**

- Talk to the bear in a firm voice.
- Try to move away from the bear's travel path; that may be all it wants you to do.
- If the bear follows you with its attention directed at you. Stop! Stand your ground and prepare to use your deterrent.
- Act aggressively toward the bear. Let the bear know you will fight if attacked. Shout! Make yourself look as big as possible. Stamp your feet as you take a step or two toward the bear. Threaten the bear with whatever is at hand. A bear that is initially curious or testing you may become predatory if you do not stand up to it. The more the bear persists, the more aggressive your response should be.
- If the bear attacks, use your deterrent and fight for your life. Kick, punch or hit the bear with whatever weapon is available. Concentrate your attack on the face, eyes and nose. Fight any bear that attacks you in your building or tent.

**Remember:**

- If an attack (that is, physical contact is made) is defensive... Play dead. (Don't play dead before you have used all possible means, such as deterrents to prevent an attack).
- If the attack is predatory... Fight back.

**Helping someone being attacked**

You may be able to drive away an attacking bear from someone else, but if you do this you risk drawing the attack to yourself.

### **Part 3: Deterrents and Preventing Problems**

#### **Deterrents**

##### **Bear Spray**

Used to deter bears at close range.

It is not 100% effective or a substitute for avoiding an encounter.

Use only approved bear sprays.  
Carry it ready to use and keep it handy in your tent at night.  
Exercise caution

### **Firearms**

Make sure it's adequate  
Practice  
Mentally rehearse the situations where you would use it.

### **Deterrents in General**

Know their capabilities and limitations.  
Can be useful but should not give you a false sense of security.  
Training and practice are essential.  
Observe regulations governing their transport and use.  
Consult with local authorities.

### **Other Detection & Deterrent Options**

Trip wires, motion detectors and compact electric fences can be useful

### **Preventing Bear Problems**

Most of bear safety is prevention  
Learn about bears  
Avoid encounters. Move away undetected from bears that are unaware of you or distant.  
Stay alert. Be aware of your surroundings. Look for signs of recent bear activity.  
Don't surprise bears. Warn bears of your presence.  
Travel in a group. Groups are noisier and easier to detect and several people are more intimidating to a bear.  
Keep children close  
Dogs. Keep it on a leash or leave it at home. The exception is a specially trained dog, but most dogs are not.  
Choose campsites carefully. Don't camp on bear travel routes. Use local knowledge of bears and recommended camping practices.  
Don't attract bears or reward them with food. Keep a clean camp free of attractants.

### **First Aid**

Be proficient in first aid.  
Carry sufficient medical supplies.

### **Communication**

Inform others of your plans.  
Communication can save lives.