

Signs of *Stress* in Bears, and your reactions to them

A brief, over-simplified, summary by John Neary, US Forest Service

shown as lowest stress level (1) to highest (5)

Brown (Grizzly) Bears show stress by:

1. Yawning, Ears erect
2. Salivating, Foaming at the mouth
3. Jaw popping, Ears back, Head down
4. Mouth agape, Looking intently, Hop charge
5. Charge

Black Bears show stress by:

1. Pursing of the lips
2. Blowing, then Huffing, minor salivating
3. Lip smack, Jaw popping, Ears back, Head down
4. Step charge, Lunge or Paw Swat
5. Charge

What you should do in reaction:

Your response to these behaviors matters a lot. If you get involved with an aggressive bear:

- **Stop and Think.** Doing nothing is the best first response.
- If the bear is not aware of you, **leave the area.**
- **Keep Your Eyes on the Bear.** Look for the important clues of its stress level as shown above. Making eye contact is unlikely to influence the bear but it helps you stay alert to the signals it is sending you.
- If a bear approaches you, **Stand Your Ground** (unless you are by its food or on its trail). React to both species of bear the same. Don't let the bear intimidate you into fleeing or backing down. Use your voice and gestures to make it aware that you are human. How you react is crucial. The term "bluff charge" implies that no matter what you do the bear will stop its charge, when the truth is, what you do makes all the difference.
- **If the bear makes contact with you:**
 1. If you positively know it's NOT a defensive bear, fight back, but if confused or unsure:
 2. Play dead. If it's a brown bear with cubs you should always try this first but this is also OK to try on a black bear that's acting defensively.
 3. If the attack continues and seems predacious, fight back, regardless of species. This is difficult to define and requires your judgment.