

WHAT TO DO WHEN A BEAR WANTS YOUR FOOD

Source: Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries

Generally black bears are naturally wary/fearful of people and prefer to avoid contact. However, bears that have been purposely fed or gotten a food reward from people may lose this wariness. These bears may try to “scare” you into leaving your food or pack. They may pop their jaws or swat the ground with their front paws while blowing and snorting, and/or may lunge or bluff charge toward you in an attempt to get you to leave. These bluff charges rarely end in contact and should never be rewarded with food that is left unattended or thrown at the bear. Should you encounter a bear displaying this behavior:

- Do not run from a bear in any situation!
- Remain calm and ready your bear spray (or other deterrent like rocks or sticks).
- Stay together if you are in a group; you will appear larger and more intimidating if you stick together.
 - Act aggressively. Look the bear straight in the eyes and let it know you will fight. Shout! Make yourself look as big as possible. Stamp your feet. Threaten the bear with whatever is handy (stick, pole, bear spray). Throw rocks or sticks (never throw anything edible!). The more the bear persists, the more aggressive your response should be.
- If a bear that is behaving in an aggressive/threatening manner is intent on making contact, your first line of defense is always your bear spray. Point the nozzle just above the bear’s head so that the spray falls into the bears eyes, nose and throat. When it is 20 to 30 feet away, give it a long blast. That should be enough to discourage it and send it in the other direction. (Be cautious of wind direction)
- Once the bear has moved away, retreat to a safe location. Take your food/pack with you. Do not run. Stay alert in case the bear returns.
- Notify your local Appalachian Trail contact, Sheriff’s Department or Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries about your encounter.