



# Wild Kids

## Too Close for Comfort

### STUDENT GUIDE

All animals need food, water, shelter, and space. Space is the place where an animal lives. Space is very important to wild animals because this is where they find their food, water, and shelter, and where they raise their young. Wild animals may try to protect their space from other animals or people. When their space is threatened, wild animals usually fight or flee. But if you get too close, some animals may give you a signal that means "Back off, you're too close!"



#### **Growl, Snarl, Snort**

Some animals may growl or snarl if you get too close. They curl back their lips, show their teeth, and make a threatening noise. If an animal makes this sound, you'd better back off!

#### **Ears Back, Nostrils Flared**

When a deer or elk feels threatened it will lay its ears back flat, flare its nostrils, and roll its eyes. It may also make a hissing sound and stand up on its hind legs, kicking its front legs. This means "Get out of my space!"

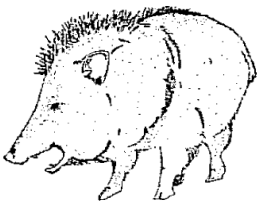


#### **Warning Call!**

Prairie dogs send out a warning call if you get too close. They stand up on their hind legs and make a chirping or barking sound. This alerts other prairie dogs that there may be danger nearby.

#### **Dive Bomb**

The mockingbird is small but very brave. If you get too close to its nest, it may swoop down at your head. The message it's giving you is "Stay away from my nest."

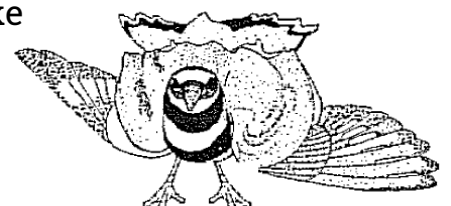


#### **Raised Hackles**

Javelina raise their hackles when they feel threatened. They may also make a clacking sound by snapping their teeth together. When a javelina bristles up and clacks its teeth, it's warning you to "Stay away!"

#### **Hey, Look at Me!**

If you get too close to a killdeer it may flutter about, acting like it has a broken wing. By drawing attention away from its nest, the killdeer is protecting its eggs.



**How close is "too close" to a mountain lion?**

1. Find a parking lot or large open area. Find a partner.
2. Have your partner stand in one spot. Pretend they are a mountain lion.
3. Now begin walking away from your partner (mountain lion).
4. When you decide you have walked far enough to put a safe distance between yourself and the mountain lion, stop.
5. Use a tape measure to measure the distance. Do you think this is "too close for comfort," or a safe distance from a mountain lion?

Try the same thing again for each of the following animals: black bear, cottontail, great horned owl, raccoon, rattlesnake, roadrunner, and skunk.

1. What is a safe distance from each animal?
2. How do you think each animal would act if you approached "too close?"
3. How would you feel if you approached "too close" to each animal? What would you do?

**What about people?**

Did you know that people need space too? If you stand too close to another person, they may feel uncomfortable. How can you tell? Here are some things a person might do if you stand too close:

- Look down or look away
- Shuffle their feet
- Make a face
- Lean back
- Wring their hands or fidget
- Move away to make more distance

Try This:

1. Stand 6 inches away from a friend and have a conversation with them. Do you think your friend is uncomfortable? How can you tell? Are you uncomfortable? How do you know?
2. Move away so there is 1 foot of distance between yourself and your friend. How does it feel? Is this more comfortable?
3. Keep moving away until you feel comfortable. Was the distance the same for both you and your friend? Did one of you need more distance in order to feel comfortable?
4. Try this again with your mom or dad. Do you think a comfortable distance would be greater or less than that for your friend?
5. What if you were talking to someone you had just met? What do you think a comfortable distance would be?

**Remember: Never touch a wild animal. All wild animals will bite to defend themselves.**



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### TEACHING GUIDE

#### Overview

In this activity, students will read a short passage about the importance of space for wildlife. Then, they will run some short simulations and experiments to determine what happens when that space is compromised and an animal (as well as people) start to feel uncomfortable.

#### Suggested Procedures

1. Print the worksheet above. If possible, print it double sided.
2. Ask students to read the article on the first page.
3. Ask some questions to assess student and class comprehension:
  - What is space? Why is it important to animals?
  - What are some ways that animals might communicate that they are uncomfortable with how close you are?
  - How do animals use their different body parts to communicate?
  - What should you do once you start to observe those behaviors in an animal?
4. Put the students in groups of two or three.
5. Have the students complete the first 5 steps under "How close is 'too close' to a mountain lion?" It will be easiest if students are working outdoors. You will need a tape measure so the students can measure distances.
6. Once the students have finished the mountain lion measurements, discuss as a class. Compare results. On average, how far did people need to be before they were comfortable?
7. Have the students repeat the steps with the other animals listed. If preferred, you can assign different animals to different groups. When finished discuss as a class.
8. Still working in their partners, have them complete the first 3 steps of "What about people?" Discuss.
9. For fun, you can have the students act out how some of these different animals would behave if a person was too close.
10. Assign the last two steps of that section as homework where they can repeat the steps with a parent or someone else they are close to.
11. Back in the class, discuss the results.

#### Grade

3rd

#### AZ Science Standards

- 3.L2U1.6

#### Science and Engineering Practices

- Plan and carry out investigations

#### Crosscutting Concepts

- Structure and Function