

## Snakebite Awareness Training

### Part 2: Lesson 5 - How do I know if a snake feels threatened?

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**Why is this important?** - If you can recognize the signs of when a snake feels threatened, you can reduce the likelihood of a bite by slowly backing away or giving the snake an escape route..

#### Threat Displays

A snake **feels threatened** if there is danger nearby, or if a potential predator gets too close. A snake will **feel cornered** if there is no escape route for them, so they will hold their ground, make a threat display, and potentially try to strike. Mambas and cobras may move toward you as a threat or to strike. However, one thing a snake will not do is chase you.

Here is an example of a **threat display in a Blanding's tree snake** (photo used with permission of Stephen Spawls).



What can we see in this picture that indicates a threat is nearby? The snake is tightly coiled with the front of its body raised up off the ground. Its mouth is open and may be hissing. The head is flattened and looks more triangular. These are all signs that the snake is feeling threatened..

Here is the ***threat display of a boomslang***. You can see the neck and front third of the body is flattened from side to side. The tongue flick may also be part of the threat display.



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Instead of flattening the neck from side to side like the boomslang, **the cobras** raise the front part of their body up and spread a hood, which is flattening the neck from top to bottom. The idea of the hood is to make the snake look much larger and more threatening. Cobras can also open their mouths (gaping), hiss, and for some species, spit their venom.



Photo used with permission from Stephen Spawls

Mambas can also spread a hood, although it is not as wide as the hood of a cobra. Here is a black mamba displaying its hood.



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### **Review Questions**

1. What might you see that tells you a snake is feeling threatened?