



Civil Air Patrol

# SENSE OF HUMOR

Values for Living—Cadet Character Development Forum

## INTRODUCTION

Each Values for Living lesson is designed to help cadets explore a life virtue from multiple angles and experience that virtue through a hands-on activity. By combining theory and practice, these lessons aim to help cadets understand and embody these virtues beyond the end of the squadron meeting.

**Humor** is a powerful aid to perseverance and morale, especially in the darkest times in our lives. This lesson invites cadets to appreciate the effect of good humor, to recognize and respond to inappropriate humor, and to practice finding humor even amidst challenging situations.

## PRECLASS CHECKLIST

Prior preparation is essential to success. Please prepare the following well ahead of time:

- All media installed and checked out
- Handouts and materials prepared and available as per teacher instruction sheet
- Phase Three cadet orientation/training completed
- Participation awards such as candy or granola bar treats available
- Room arrangements complete

## ATTENTION GETTER

**LARGE GROUP FACILITATED BY CHAPLAIN/CDI/COMMANDER (5 MINUTES.)**

How many of you are perfect in your rendering of customs and courtesies? We aim for excellence in showing respect, but we all fall short at times. Sometimes we forget or simply fail to pay attention when we should. What's the best way to fix this problem? In this video, you'll learn how one Army battalion is working to improve military discipline.

[**Show Media File:** Capt Wedley, BN Disciplinator<sup>1</sup> or a humorous, short video clip of your choosing, as long as it is clean and appropriate for cadets.]

Today's character development lesson isn't about customs and courtesies. We're not bringing Captain Wedley to the squadron, at least not yet. Instead, we're going to talk today about how

humor can help you be a better leader. In your small groups, you'll share some of the funniest things that have happened to you. Using those examples, you will then try to figure out what makes something funny.

**Option 2:** in the event that video resources are unavailable at your meeting time, tell this joke, or come up with the funniest clean joke you can find that's appropriate for cadets:

A German Shepherd, Doberman, and a cat have died.  
All three are faced with the Creator who wants to know what they believe in.  
The German shepherd says: "I believe in discipline, training, and loyalty to my master."  
"Good," says the Creator. "Sit down on my right side. Doberman, what do you believe in?"  
The Doberman answers: "I believe in the love, care, and protection of my master."  
Ah," said the Creator. "You may sit to my left."  
Then he looks at the cat and asks, "And what do you believe in?"  
The cat answers: "I believe you're sitting in my seat."<sup>2</sup>

Today's character development lesson is about how humor can help you be a better leader. In your small groups, you'll share some of the funniest things that have happened to you. Using those examples, you will then try to figure out what makes something funny, even if no cats are involved.

## UNDERSTANDING THE DESIRED BEHAVIOR

**SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION LED BY PHASE 3 CADETS (3-5 PEOPLE IN EACH GROUP. 10 MINUTES.)**

**Small Group Exercise/Discussion** – (no more than 6 in each group including senior cadet moderator)

Cadet Facilitators should lead their small groups in a discussion:

- Have each member of your small group share the funniest thing that ever happened to them. Offer your own example first so that the junior cadets have a few minutes to decide what they are going to share. If someone is stuck, ask which elements of the video he or she found especially funny.
- Ask the cadets why certain things make us laugh. Can they find any common threads in the funny situations they described?
- How would you explain the differences between different kinds of humor? For example, what is the difference between slapstick and puns? Can the cadets name other kinds of humor?
- The cadets may struggle here, so give them time. They may not have answers but should at least start thinking about the differences.

## APPLICATION OF THE BEHAVIOR TO THEIR LIVES

### LARGE GROUP FACILITATED BY CHAPLAIN/CDI/COMMANDER (15 MINUTES)

Chaplains/CDIs/commanders should continue the lesson with a large group discussion based on the following prompts:

- In your small groups, you considered what makes something funny. Will one of you please share your ideas with the whole group?
  - Facilitators may need to help the cadets. Humor often comes from contradicting our expectations. The set-up shows a pattern and the punchline breaks it. Something seems funny because it's out of place. For example, tackling is not the proper way to encourage military discipline!
- How does humor relate to CAP's core values?
  - This question may prove challenging to the cadets; here are some ideas.
    - **Integrity.** Our humor should be appropriate to our commitments as CAP members. Is this a joke you can tell in uniform? Would you tell this joke in front of your mother?
    - **Volunteer Service.** Humor can improve morale, making it fun to volunteer our time and talents.
    - **Excellence.** Excellence demands that we try our best, but even our best may not be enough for mission success. When we fail or struggle, humor can help us keep perspective.
    - **Respect.** Respectful humor builds people up to carry them through challenging times. Respectful humor does not put down or belittle our teammates or partners.
- Moral virtues are usually a balance between two extremes. How would you describe a person with too much humor? What is it like to work with such a person? (Hint: Aristotle called the excess of humor "buffoonery").
- How would you describe a person with too little humor? What is it like to work with such a person? (Another hint: Aristotle called the deficiency of humor "boorishness").
- Laughter benefits our physical, mental, and social health. Laughter can improve your immune response, reduce pain, and even prevent heart disease. You may not be able to see these changes without the help of your doctor, but there are some benefits you can see. How does laughter affect your mental health? How does laughter affect your relationships?

- If necessary, you may use the table below to come up with leading questions. For example, “Cadet Smith, will you tell us about a time that laughter helped defuse conflict?”

MENTAL HEALTH	SOCIAL HEALTH
Adds joy and zest to life	Strengthens relationships
Eases anxiety and tension	Attracts others to us
Relieves stress	Enhances teamwork
Improves your mood	Helps defuse conflict
Strengthens resilience	Promotes group bonding

- On the other hand, some kinds of humor can be detrimental to individuals and teams. What kind of humor should be out of bounds for us as CAP members?
- Close by reading the following to set up the small group activity:

Survivors of the Nazi Genocide reported that humor was critical to their survival. In his memoir, *Night*, Elie Wiesel records one such joke:

In Treblinka, where a day's food was some stale bread and a cup of rotting soup, one prisoner cautions a fellow inmate against gluttony. “Hey Moshe, don't overeat. Think of us who will have to carry you!”<sup>3</sup>

Such “gallows humor” provided a break from the misery and despair of the camps. During challenging situations, humor can sustain morale and build camaraderie.

Good humor is a virtue and we can only develop virtues through practice. In your small groups, you'll first practice responding appropriately to inappropriate jokes. Next, you'll work together to find humor even in challenging situations.

## ACTIVITY

### SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY LED BY PHASE 3 CADETS (3-5 PEOPLE IN EACH GROUP. 15 MINUTES.)

These two activities may prove challenging. Please warn the cadets of the difficulty and ask them to be patient and considerate. Cadet facilitators are responsible for ensuring that the humor is respectful and encouraging.

#### Part One: Responding to Inappropriate Humor

Because Respect is one of our Core Values, there is no place for disrespectful humor in CAP. For example, we do not make jokes about gender, race, religion or disability. Moreover, we need to practice appropriate ways of responding to inappropriate humor. Ask every cadet to come up with at least one way to respond to an inappropriate joke.

Examples: "Sir/ma'am, I'm not comfortable with that comment." "Excuse me, sir, but that joke wasn't appropriate." "Sir/ma'am, that joke would make someone feel unwelcome in our squadron."

Remind cadets to criticize the comment or joke, not the person making the joke. "That joke was offensive" is acceptable; "Only a jerk would tell that kind of joke" is not.

Now comes the hard part for cadet facilitators. Please give your group a chance to practice responding to an inappropriate joke. We leave it to your discretion to choose the joke, with two rules. (1) Keep it clean. (2) Make the put-down yourself, your chaplain, your CDI, or commander if the commander is the facilitator. We are willing to be mocked for the benefit of the cadets.

Here's an example: "Great job, guys. You're much better at explaining things than our CDI; maybe you should have her job." Give your small group the opportunity to notice and respond to the put-down. If they don't catch it, point out why the joke was inappropriate, and that they should have responded. Ask them to practice their responses on you (even after the fact). You need a lot of courage to tell someone to his or her face that a comment was inappropriate!

**Part One Wrap-up:** All CAP members should follow these four rules when responding to a "humorous" putdown or inappropriate wisecrack:

1. Don't stay quiet. Inappropriate remarks violate our CAP core values and need to be addressed.
2. Take the person aside and speak with them privately. Always praise in public and correct in private.
3. Be respectful, even if they were not. Be a model of our core values.
4. If you feel concerned about speaking up, find a trusted cadet leader or senior member and ask for help dealing with the situation.

### **Part Two: Finding Humor in a Difficult Situation**

Ask everyone in the group to describe a source of stress, either past or present. Be careful not to judge what any cadet shares. Instead, affirm with supportive statements. Try, "I can see how that would be upsetting," or "I'm sorry you have to deal with that."

As a group, pick one of the shared sources of stress and find something funny about it. You may find a lot to laugh about in even one bad situation. If your group gets stuck, remember that humor usually breaks our expectations. What aren't you expecting in this situation? How would this behavior look in another context? Repeat the process with as many stressful situations as time allows.

## LESSON SUMMARY AND WRAP-UP

### LARGE GROUP FACILITATED BY CHAPLAIN/CDI/COMMANDER (5 MINUTES)

Flight attendants on Southwest Airlines are notorious for mixing jokes into cabin announcements. Here's one example. "Southwest Airlines would like to welcome a first-time flyer on board today. He's also celebrating his 89th birthday. Ladies and Gentlemen, let's have a big round of applause for our pilot!" Humor puts everyone at ease and makes the passengers want to pay attention.

Although we may not expect a change in cabin pressure, things don't always go the way we planned. No oxygen mask will drop from the compartment above you, but a witty remark can be a breath of fresh air. If you are seated next to a child or someone acting like one, a little levity could make the whole trip more pleasant. It might even lower your blood pressure. In the unlikely event of a water landing, just think of the great story you'll be able to tell your grandchildren. Finally, please use caution with inappropriate jokes in the overhead bins. Expectations may have shifted during flight and, as we all know, shift happens.

So, sit back, relax, and try to enjoy the ride. Or you can sit up and be tense. The choice is yours!

## QUOTABLE QUOTES

"A sense of humor is God's antidote for anger and frustration."

—Rick Warren (Pastor)

"If you can find humor in your own troubles, you will actually begin to see them in a different light."

—Kristine Joy Escarilla (author)

"If you are going to go big, to dare to change the world and be seen, you're going to need your sense of humor."

—Jodi Flynn (Business Leader)

"Allow humor to lighten the burden of your tender heart."

—Maya Angelou (American poet and author)

<sup>1</sup> Special thanks to Hank Braxton for granting permission to edit and use the Capt Wedley video for this character forum.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from <https://www.sunnyskyz.com/funny-jokes/256/A-German-Shepherd-Doberman-And-Cat-Have-Died-And-Gone-To-Heaven>

<sup>3</sup> Wiesel, Ellie. *Night*. New York: Penguin Books Limited, 2012.