



PATIENCE

Values for Living—Cadet Character Development Forum

INTRODUCTION

Each Values for Living character development forum helps Civil Air Patrol members explore a virtue from multiple angles and practice that virtue through a hands-on activity. The combination of analysis and practice helps members internalize the virtue so it stays with them beyond the end of the squadron meeting.

Patience helps us resist the negative emotions that come from any kind of hardship. Patience is less about waiting than about attitudes. How do we handle our emotions when things don't go the way we intended? In this lesson, participants will explore the meaning of patience and practice behaviors that cultivate patience.

PRECLASS CHECKLIST

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

- All media installed and checked out
- Activity materials prepared and available
- 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.)

Option 1: The Marshmallow Test (Media)

Psychologist Walter Mischel is best known for an experiment called the Marshmallow Test. In this experiment, the examiner seats a child at a table with a single marshmallow and gives the child a choice. If the child will wait fifteen minutes to eat that marshmallow, he will earn a second marshmallow. The examiner then leaves the child alone with the marshmallow to make his choice. Mischel's video footage from the experiment was so funny that many people have tried to replicate it. Here is one example.

[Show Media File: Patience-Marshmallow-Test.mp4. Note: This clip is intended for Character Development use only. Please respect the privacy of the participants and do not distribute the video or any portion of it.]

Children are wonderful subjects for this experiment because we can see their emotional struggles on their faces. Resisting the desire to eat that marshmallow is hard!

Mischel followed his test subjects for over twenty years. He found that children who waited to eat the marshmallow had higher SAT scores, greater educational achievement, and better Body Mass Index (BMI) scores. Why were these people more successful? According to Mischel, these people had better outcomes because they learned to regulate their negative emotions. Mischel calls this ability “willpower” or “self-control,” but in this lesson, we’re going to call it *patience*.

Patience comes from the Latin word *patior*, which means “to suffer” or “to endure.” Patience is our ability to resist feelings of sadness, anger, or frustration when we face hardship, difficulty, or delay. Patience is not about *waiting*; patience is about *attitude*.

Option 2: Easy/Hard Activity (No Media)

This short activity can help cadets think more deeply about their reactions to difficult situations.

Have the cadets stand between two walls, one marked EASY and the other marked HARD. As you name scenarios like those listed below, have each cadet move between the two walls to indicate how easy or difficult it is to be patient in each situation. Give them enough time to think and move between each scenario.

Sample scenarios:

- My siblings mess up my stuff
- Falling out of step while marching
- My coach takes me out of the game
- Receiving a low grade on a test or big assignment
- My ride is late picking me up from school or practice
- A long line at the grocery store
- Sitting in traffic (especially if already running late)
- Monday morning
- An exciting vacation still two months away
- A friend betraying your trust

The chaplain/CDI/commander can list further scenarios to keep the game going if needed. You may want to ask the cadets for some scenarios as well.

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UNDERSTANDING THE DESIRED BEHAVIOR

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

Cadet Facilitators should lead their small groups in a discussion using the following prompts:

- [If you used the video:] What do you think the children in the video were feeling? How could you tell?
- Think back to a time when a parent or teacher was upset, frustrated, or discouraged. Describe the situation for us. What did the parent or teacher do that showed you how he or she was feeling? How did that leader's emotions and behavior affect you?
- Now think of your own life and some things or situations that upset you. Try to come up with at least three of these "triggers" and share them with the group.
- When you're upset, how do your feelings affect your behavior?
- Here's a passage from our leadership book: "Although attitude is something that exists in your mind, it is visible to the people around you. Facial expressions, gestures, posture, and tone of voice reveal your attitude." (*Learn to Lead* vol. 1, p.12) Think again about your own behavior. Can you describe a time when your behavior affected the people around you?

The small group facilitator should close the discussion by reading or paraphrasing the following:

Here's the takeaway: if you do not control your emotions, your emotions will control you. When we're upset, angry, frustrated, or discouraged, we must not allow our emotions to negatively affect our attitudes. Remember, attitudes are contagious. By controlling your own negative emotions, you can help everyone around you control theirs.

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. Select from the following prompts, according to the needs of your unit, or propose your own questions. All units should discuss the final prompt on techniques for reframing and establishing a positive attitude.

- We've seen that patience is about attitudes. It's a measure of how gracefully we can suffer hardship or difficulty. How does patience help you live out our CAP Core Values?
- All of us face challenges in our involvement in CAP. Perhaps it's a procedure, a difficult test, or even someone here in the squadron who gets under your skin. What sort of challenges are you facing right now that demand your patience?

- In your small groups, you talked about patience and infectious attitudes. Besides spreading bad attitudes, how can a lack of patience get us into trouble?
 - Your cadets may need some guidance on this question. If necessary, ask some leading questions, such as the following:
 - When you are upset, how is your thinking affected?
 - When your parents are in a hurry, how does their driving change?
 - What happens when you rush through an unpleasant chore or assignment?
 - Ever sat through boring class or activity? How does your boredom affect your participation?
 - When you encounter a roadblock getting what you want, do you look for satisfaction elsewhere?

- Impatience can result in a wide range of negative emotions. One extreme is allowing our negative emotions to become so intense that they control us and damage others. The other extreme is resignation, or completely giving up. What negative consequences might come from resignation?

- You learned in your leadership textbooks that “a positive attitude begins in the realization that attitude is a choice—you can choose to be positive, or you can choose to be negative.” (*Learn to Lead*, vol. 1, p.13) When you notice yourself getting upset, what can you do to calm yourself and regain a positive attitude?
 - Again, your cadets may need some guidance. Here are a few suggestions:
 - Count backwards from ten.
 - Take deep breaths or using a four-count “box” breathing pattern (inhale for four seconds, hold for four seconds, exhale for four seconds, hold for four seconds; repeat).
 - Imagine the future. The current situation may be unpleasant, but it will lead to something much more positive.
 - Imagine something worse. Sometimes we can ease our disappointment by considering that things could be much worse than they are!
 - Think of the people around you. Sometimes it’s easier to take care of others than to take care of ourselves.
 - Imagine that you are being watched by someone you respect greatly. How would you want to behave in front of this person?
 - Practice gratitude. It’s almost impossible to be grateful and angry at the same time. When things are going well, stop to remember what is working and communicate your thankfulness to someone around you.
 - Make if/then plans. If some bad thing happens, you don’t have to decide in the moment how you will respond. Instead, you can fall back on your plan. For example, if you need to criticize someone, you resolve to compliment that person first.

ACTIVITY

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

Patience is a virtue that must be developed. We don't become patient people without practice. Choose one of the following activities to give the cadets an opportunity to practice patience.

Option 1: Marshmallow Vacuum

Required materials: two bowls per cadet team (small group), one straw per cadet, at least two marshmallows per cadet. **Please consult your unit's safety officer to ensure that this activity complies with current, local COVID-19 precautions.**

This activity involves a competition between groups and should be led by the cadet facilitators. Where possible, the group size should be equal. If groups are not equal, when the first cadet completes the task, he or she should go to the end to perform the task a second time so that each group is made equal. Have each group of cadets stand in a straight line.

One of the cadet facilitators should give the following instructions:

1. The object of the exercise is to move the marshmallows from one tray to another.
2. We can move only one marshmallow at a time.
3. We must take turns. At any given time, only one cadet from each team may be moving a marshmallow. Once you have successfully moved a marshmallow, you may not attempt to move another until everyone else on your team has successfully moved a marshmallow as well.
4. We may only move the marshmallows by generating enough suction with these straws to lift and carry the marshmallows. If anyone on your team pierces a marshmallow with the straw, you must return all your team's marshmallows to the starting tray.
5. This is a race; the team that successfully moves its marshmallows first wins.

A note to the cadet facilitators (do not read aloud): You should expect some dropped marshmallows and perhaps even some punctured marshmallows. The point of the exercise is to create a fun but moderately stressful environment in which cadets may practice patiently dealing with negative emotions. Allow cadets to express frustration but redirect unkind words. If time permits, you may want to run the race a second or third time.

When races are complete, the cadets should return to their small groups with their cadet facilitators. In the small group setting, the cadet facilitator should debrief their groups. Consider using some of the following questions:

- How did you feel when you were trying to move the marshmallow?
- Did you notice anyone else's frustration during the exercise? How could you tell?
- How did the whole group react when the race was over? What behaviors did you see?
- What negative emotions did you feel during the exercise? For example, were you frustrated at the difficulty of moving the marshmallow, angry at teammates who struggled, anxious about performing in front of the group, or disappointed if we didn't win?

- Did you notice any negative emotions as you were experiencing them? (Sometimes we only realize after the fact how upset we have become!)
- If you did notice your own negative emotions, how did you respond to them? Did you use any of the techniques we discussed in the large group session?
- What are some positive ways to express your frustration or disappointment during an activity like this?

Option 2: House of Cards

Required materials: one deck of cards per small group (available as a dollar store item)

This activity involves a competition between groups of cadets as they try to build the tallest house of cards in a limited amount of time. The activity should be directed by the cadet facilitators.

Provide each cadet small group a pack of cards. One of the cadet facilitators should give the following instructions:

1. The object of the exercise is for each group to build a house of cards.
2. You may use any way of arranging the cards to build the house, and you may have multiple cadets holding cards as you assemble it, but it must be free-standing at the end.
3. No additional materials are allowed, such as tape or paper clips. You may use only the cards, gravity, and friction.
4. The team with the highest house of cards wins. If two teams have card houses the same height, the team with the most cards in the house wins.

When time is up, the houses are measured, and winners announced, the cadets should return to their small groups with their cadet facilitators. In the small group setting, the cadet facilitator should debrief their groups. Consider using some of the following questions:

- How did you feel when you were trying to get the cards to stay standing?
- Did you notice anyone else's frustration during the exercise? How could you tell?
- How did the whole group react when the competition was over? What behaviors did you see?
- What negative emotions did you feel during the exercise? For example, were you frustrated at the difficulty of getting the cards to stay standing, angry at teammates who struggled, anxious about performing in front of the group, or disappointed if we didn't win?
- Did you notice any negative emotions as you were experiencing them? (Sometimes we only realize after the fact how upset we have become!)
- If you did notice your own negative emotions, how did you respond to them? Did you use any of the techniques we discussed in the large group session?
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LESSON SUMMARY AND WRAP-UP

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

In this lesson, we've seen that patience helps us deal with negative emotions. It's not about waiting but about attitudes. Because attitudes are contagious, our teams need us to practice patience, especially when we're in leadership roles.

We've also practiced two techniques for improving patience.

The first technique is *knowing your triggers*. You should know what situations or events are likely to upset you. When you're aware of your triggers, you're more likely to recognize negative emotions when they emerge and respond accordingly, for example, by counting down from ten or taking a few deep breaths. Please note that understanding your triggers doesn't give you the right to demand a change in someone else's behavior. Instead, you want to know your triggers so that you can monitor and control your own behavior.

The second technique is called *reframing*. Reframing is a process by which we look at our experiences in a different way. In fact, you could say that perspective is the key to patience!

- Are you frustrated right now? Think about how you'll feel about this moment in ten minutes, ten days, or ten years.
- Are you angry at someone? Think about how that person is feeling.
- Are you sad about something you lost? Take a moment to be grateful for the time you enjoyed it.
- Do you feel like your current task is impossible? Remember all the pioneers and innovators who were told the same thing but refused to believe it and kept on going.

You can't choose your emotions, but you can choose what to do with them. By practicing the virtue of patience, you can turn even your most negative emotions into positive attitudes.

QUOTABLE QUOTES

"Patience is not the ability to wait, but how you act while you are waiting." – Joyce Meyer

"Have patience with all things, but first of all with yourself." – Saint Francis de Sales

"Patience is the ability to count down before you blast off!" – Anonymous

"Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly."
– Proverbs 14:29

"It is easier to find men who will volunteer to die, than to find those who are willing to endure pain with patience." – Julius Caesar

"Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; remember that what you now have was once among the things you only hoped for." – Epicurus

"Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." – Reinhold Niebuhr