



Civil Air Patrol

RESPECTFUL DISAGREEMENT

Values for Living—Cadet Character Development Forum (For Online Delivery)

INTRODUCTION

Each Values for Living 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.

Public discourse is ever more contentious and bitter. We attack each other with unfair criticisms and name-calling. We divide ourselves into tribes and draw lines of battle. How can we resist this onslaught of inflammatory rhetoric? **Respectful disagreement** begins with charitable listening. Appreciating those who disagree can help us refine our own opinions. Simple courtesy can work wonders in restoring harmony to our communities.

PRECLASS CHECKLIST

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

- Be familiar with and test the online software platform you will use for the meeting
- If appropriate, schedule several sessions with fewer participants

Consult your wing IT Officer for conferencing resources the wing may already have in place.

This lesson is designed to be completed in 40 minutes if needed. Online group discussions will have a different tempo and may feel forced. Facilitators may choose to call on participants rather than asking for volunteers.

ATTENTION GETTER

LARGE GROUP FACILITATED BY CHAPLAIN/CDI/COMMANDER (5-10 MINUTES.)

Option 1: Multimedia

If you are using virtual meeting software, share this link with your participants and give them a few minutes to watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zl3c0G8iAlo>

Option 2: Personal story

Share a story about a friend with whom you disagree strongly on issues of great importance to you. How are you able to remain friends despite your disagreement?

UNDERSTANDING THE DESIRED BEHAVIOR

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

The following short-answer questions are designed to encourage participation in an online meeting format. Participants who are shy about using a microphone may be encouraged to type short answers in chat windows.

- When was the last time someone disagreed with you? How did the disagreement make you feel? Did you think the other person understood what you were saying?
- What does *disrespectful* disagreement look like? Where do you most often encounter people disagreeing disrespectfully?
- [If you used the video] Justice Ginsberg and Justice Scalia disagreed on fundamental principles but remained friends. They respected and appreciated each other without compromising their convictions. How do you think they did it?
- How can you disagree with someone while at the same time demonstrating your respect for that person? [If participants struggle with this question, facilitators may offer some suggestions, for example:]
 - Ask questions
 - Restate the other person's argument
 - Acknowledge the other person's feelings
 - Find something praiseworthy in the other argument
 - Draw attention to the points on which you agree
 - Admit to weaknesses in your own argument
 - Thank the other person for sharing his or her opinion

APPLICATION OF THE BEHAVIOR TO THEIR LIVES

ONLINE GROUP FACILITATED BY CHAPLAIN/CDI/COMMANDER (15 MINUTES)

The following questions require more thoughtful responses. Facilitators may ask for volunteers or call on specific participants. Because some online meeting platforms limit meeting time, facilitators may choose a few of the following questions they would most like to discuss.

- Obviously, our Core Value of Respect requires that we disagree respectfully. How does respectful disagreement help us live the other core values?
- Why do you think there is so much disrespectful disagreement on the internet?
- What is the best way to disagree with your commanding officer, teacher, or boss? What is the best way to disagree with a subordinate or junior? Are there times when it isn't appropriate to disagree?
- What happens to a community in which people regularly disagree disrespectfully?

- Robert Zimmer, the president of the University of Chicago, argues that universities cannot function if their members are not able to disagree. “Having one’s assumptions challenged and experiencing the discomfort that sometimes accompanies this process are intrinsic parts of an excellent education.” Put simply, if no one will disagree with you, you can’t get a good education. Civil Air Patrol isn’t a university, but we do have an educational mission. How much room for disagreement do we need in Civil Air Patrol?

ACTIVITY

LED BY ONLINE INSTRUCTOR (10 MINUTES.)

This activity is an exercise in resisting inflammatory rhetoric. Please read the instructions to the group. Then read the first passage and moderate a group discussion of the questions that follow. Repeat this procedure for the second passage. Conclude by reading the activity wrap-up.

Instructions:

For this group exercise, I will read two passages from online opinion pages. Both passages contain inflammatory rhetoric and fall far short of respectful disagreement. Resist the urge to respond in anger.

As you are listening to each passage, ask yourself a few questions. How does the author feel—angry, afraid, confused? What does the author think or believe that contributes to these feelings? What does the author need or want? What are the author’s best points?

After listening to the passage, we will work together to summarize the author’s position. We should be able to express that opinion with greater clarity and charity.

First Passage, from [Daily Kos](#):¹

Today, a Trump-supporting family in my neighborhood decided to have a big birthday party for their daughter. About 50 people — parents and children — are congregated on their small front lawn. They are packed in there like sardines, not observing the six-foot distance guideline to reduce the risk of transmission of Covid-19. Even worse, none of them are wearing a face mask.

It seems to me like this family is basically having a political rally disguised as a birthday party on their lawn. They were already known to their neighbors as conservatives, and today they want the whole neighborhood to know where their political allegiance lies — with the maskless, lawless, science-denying, public-health-jeopardizing president in the White House.

I wonder how many people will ultimately become infected and die of the coronavirus just because of this one reckless gathering? If even one person in that crowd is an asymptomatic carrier of the virus, it could spread to dozens of people today alone, and then those people will go to work, go shopping, etc., and perhaps hundreds or even thousands will become infected — all because one family wanted to make a political statement.

Questions:

- 1) How does the author feel?
- 2) What does the author think or believe that contributes to these feelings?
- 3) What does the author need or want?
- 4) What are the author's best points?
- 5) How would you summarize the author's position?

Second passage, from Town Hall:²

Each day in my studio I monitor CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC. While CNN is insufferable, when it comes to masks the leader is MSNBC. Their correspondents have clearly been given a mask mandate for the ultimate in showbiz hype. A reporter on the beach in California, or leaning on a fence at a hog farm in Georgia, an empty sidewalk in France, and boardwalk in Atlantic City – I've seen all these scenes and more. Each one outside, not a soul nearby, and proudly reporting through their own custom-sewn mask. The reporter in France was even wearing rubber gloves!

They're not doing it for their safety. They're doing it to feed viewer fear and continue to build the hysterical notion that lurking around every corner is a hovering-in-mid-air virus just waiting to be inhaled into your lungs like car exhaust fumes or second-hand smoke. The mask will save you! So, I guess we should never take them off again?

Many know we're on to them and how silly this is. So they've turned the rules of mask-wearing around on those who question by making you sound like an irresponsible citizen if you don't comply. "You must wear a mask so I don't get sick! What if you're carrying something? I don't want to catch it! Be considerate!"

Just like that, if you weren't scared into wearing a mask you'll be shamed into wearing one. But it can't be both. Which is it? We're all potentially sick, or we're all protecting ourselves from getting sick? See the game? Heads they win, tails you lose.

Questions:

- 1) How does the author feel?
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Activity Wrap-Up

Inflammatory rhetoric can be upsetting. Anger and fear make it harder to think clearly and harder to behave courteously. The next time you encounter inflammatory rhetoric, take a few deep breaths, listen charitably, and then try to restate the author's opinion more respectfully.

LESSON SUMMARY AND WRAP-UP

LARGE GROUP FACILITATED BY CHAPLAIN/CDI/COMMANDER (2 MINUTES)

These days, the fastest way to get attention is to make your audience angry or afraid. When readers and viewers are angry or afraid, they click and share more often. More clicks and more shares mean more money.

Anger and fear becomes a problem when it divides us into tribes that hate each other. Once we have decided that we are enemies, we stop listening to each other. We discount each other's feelings and ideas. We give up on working together. We lose sight of the real problem and focus instead on blaming or ridiculing "those people."

It does not have to be this way. You can refuse to descend into tribalism. You can listen to others and treat them with respect, especially when you disagree. You can welcome disagreement to sharpen your understanding of complex issues. You can make a habit of charitably summarizing the positions of those with whom you disagree. Respectful disagreement will make you a better citizen, a better teammate, and a better leader.

QUOTABLE QUOTES

"I attack ideas, I don't attack people - and some very good people have some very bad ideas."
— Antonin Scalia

"Welcome the disagreement. Remember the slogan, 'When two partners always agree, one of them is not necessary.' If there is some point you haven't thought about, be thankful if it is brought to your attention."
— Dale Carnegie

"You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger."
— James 1:19

"Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply."
— Stephen R. Covey

"One of the surest signs of maturity is the ability to disagree with someone while still remaining respectful."
— Dave Willis

"When we are debating an issue, loyalty means giving me your honest opinion, whether you think I'll like it or not. Disagreement, at this state, stimulates me. But once a decision is made, the debate ends. From that point on, loyalty means executing the decision as if it were your own."
— Colin Powell

"If you have learned how to disagree without being disagreeable, then you have discovered the secret of getting along."
— Bernard Meltzer

¹ Stetson, Eric, "What Republicans Are Doing to Make a Political Statement," Daily Kos, May 23, 2020, <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2020/5/23/1947168/-What-Republicans-Are-Doing-to-Prove-a-Political-Point>

² Stigall, Chris, "Masks Aren't Meant For Presidents," Town Hall, May 22, 2020, <https://townhall.com/columnists/christigall/2020/05/22/masks-arent-meant-for-presidents-n2569277>