



Care And Feeding of Your Cadet

A cheat sheet guide to Civil Air Patrol for parents

Your son or daughter has taken the plunge and joined this Civil Air Patrol thing. You may find that in a couple weeks, your cadet (you know them as junior) will come home from the weekly meeting talking in cryptic phrases, including words like “Alpha flight,” “gigline,” “parade rest,” or the ever popular “dress right dress.” Uh oh, where’s the translator? This handout serves as a guide to answer your questions, and also let you know where to go to get answers not found here.

Someone once said “Two hours a week is a tough way to run an Air Force,” and it’s true. We only get around 2 ½ hrs of training a week, but there are many, many more hours in between. The purpose of this document is to help *you* help *us*. Don’t worry Moms and Dads; help is on the way in the next couple pages.

Your Cadet



First, let’s talk about “your cadet” (as we’ll call your son or daughter throughout). Your cadet is still your kid, even though you’ve loaned him or her to us for a few hours during the week (returned in better shape than before we borrowed him or her... at least more respectful, we hope.)

Part of the cadet program is about responsibility and leadership, and it’s important that your cadet learn about those responsibilities. For example, when we inspect your cadet’s uniform at inspection, it’s not Mom or Dad standing there being inspected, it’s your cadet. They are ultimately responsible for their uniform. They are responsible for completing the requirements for each achievement to be promoted. When and where possible, please help them be responsible for their actions. Mom isn’t standing inspection, so if your cadet’s shirt isn’t pressed; the answer “my Mom didn’t do it” doesn’t work for us!

Organization

Your cadet will be assigned to what is called an “*element*”, a group of 2-5 cadets supervised by another cadet, called an “*element leader*,” who is probably not much more advanced in the leadership department than your cadet is. They are your cadet’s FIRST person in the “chain of command.” This is the person your cadet calls when there is a question or if your cadet is going to miss a squadron meeting or activity.

Between two and four of these



elements make up a “*flight*” which is headed up by a more senior cadet called the “*flight commander*.” This cadet is more senior than the element leaders and is assisted by a “*flight sergeant*” These two cadets are your cadet’s next link in the “chain of command,” and they are the next to get a phone call if your cadet’s *element leader* is not available.

One or more of these *flights* make up the “*squadron*.” The cadet portion of the squadron is run by a “*cadet commander*” and his staff of more advanced cadets. He’s the next stop in your cadet’s chain of command.

All of the cadets in the chain of command report through the cadet commander to the *Deputy Commander for Cadets*, an adult member of the unit who is in charge of all the cadet functions (hence his clever title.) For parents, he’s probably your first point of contact for any questions or concerns you might have.



If your cadet can’t get in touch with the element leader, the flight sergeant or flight commander is next up the line, followed by the squadron first sergeant or cadet commander. You’ll eventually see a roster with all these names on it, but for now just know that they are there and they’re the first people on the list your cadet should contact when they have a question, concern or problem. One day, your cadet will be an element leader as part of their growth and leadership development. Your encouragement and understanding of the role this first line plays will help your cadet to become more responsible.

About the Cadet Program itself

The cadet program exists as a framework within which cadets get to learn, grow, develop, lead and excel. While the components of the program are spelled out in our regulations, the actual execution of that program is up to the local squadron. One unit is different from the next in terms of their schedules, policies, activities and that sort of thing. The basis, however, is always in the Cadet Program.

Notwithstanding the differences between squadrons, the cadet program has five functional areas:

Leadership – Here cadets learn followership, teamwork, and how to march (*putting these important concepts into a real physical activity*). Eventually, they learn how to lead those activities as they move up the ranks and increase their responsibilities. These responsibilities are serious. They will eventually be in charge of several other cadets, with the potential of someday being in charge of all of the cadets in their squadron.



Aerospace Education – Aviation and space studies serve to give many (but not all) of the cadets a “common bond” in their interests. Cadets learn aerospace through classes, self-study of their aerospace manuals and aerospace activities. As they move up, they act as aerospace mentors for the younger cadets. We are, after all the, Civil **AIR** Patrol!

Physical Fitness – Physical fitness involves regular activity and a physical fitness test for advancement. Don’t worry, the test isn’t terribly difficult for the first couple promotions, but it does get harder. The big thing is that your cadet won’t get good at physical fitness by doing PT just once a month with the squadron. It has to be part of an ongoing program that they do at home or school. We try and set the foundation for you to build a healthy program to keep your cadet healthy and fit. Less than 2 hours of organized physical fitness once a month is not going to make a hill of beans if there isn’t something going on outside the unit.

Moral Leadership – Our moral leadership officer guides the cadets in discussions about ethics, leadership, morals and values as they relate to our society and our program.

Activities – Activities are a key component of our cadet program, in that they encompass all the things we do “outside” of a meeting. Weekend bivouacs, the marching “drill” team, flag presentations, aerospace field trips, inter-unit competitions, search & rescue training exercises, leadership training, and many other events. More on the specifics of Activities later.

Uniforms

Oh boy, this is where things are going to get interesting. Uniforms, more than anything, confuse Moms & Dads because there are many “gotchas” that are not Mom & Dad friendly. Your cadet should get some training on this, but *you* won’t!

You should help your cadet initially with some of these things, but eventually he or she will get the hang of it and should do their own uniform maintenance. Let’s go over the most commonly found parental errors and questions:

Washing – Uniforms need to be clean, neat & well pressed.

As you’re aware (*but your cadet may not be*) there is



no such thing as the “laundry fairy.” Start early, mom or dad, in teaching your cadet that they should be responsible for making sure their uniform is clean and ready to go.

Most of the uniforms are washable at home: the BDU (camouflage) shirt & trousers, and the blue shirt for the blues. The other components, usually the dark blue parts, are dry clean only. Wash uniform parts, particularly those with patches sewn on them, in cold water, and tumble or hang dry. Heat causes uniform materials to shrink at different rates, which leads to puckers and wrinkles around patches. Remove pin-on or slide-on insignia from the shirts (collar insignia, mostly) as these will not survive washing.

Starching & pressing – Starching is not required. In fact, if you read the label inside the BDUs, it says



not to use starch. However, if they choose to use starch, here are some pointers. Starch takes on a couple forms: spray starch & liquid starch. Spray starch is the easiest method, but produces the least durable results (*word of warning: over-sprayed starch that misses the ironing board and lands on linoleum is slippery!*) Liquid starching is a bit more process-intensive, but the results are nice. Commercial laundering is the most expensive process and is still no guarantee of a good press. Use a steam iron set just a bit over medium or just inside the steam range and press away. Again, for your own sanity: teach your cadet how to do this and let them run with it. After all, *they* are the one standing inspection.

Wing Patches – Wing patches should be machine-sewn onto the uniforms, if at all possible. They must be sewn on straight, centered and a ¾ inch from the shoulder seam. The crease in the sleeve will not be centered with the patch. Use similar colored thread as the patch.

Avoid quick solutions like “StitchWitch” as these will ruin the uniform and the patch will fall off eventually. We have years and years of experience with this and have learned the hard way what doesn’t work.

Nametapes – Your cadet will get some 1” wide ultramarine (blue) cloth tapes with white lettering. One set should have a last name on them; the other should say “CIVIL AIR PATROL.” These are called “nametapes.”

First order of business: **DON’T CUT THE NAME TAPES!** (Did we mention that you shouldn’t cut the nametapes?). Too often, Moms & Dads cut the name tapes even with the ends of the pockets. **DON’T!** Instead, lay them out on the uniform, find the center of the name or words on the nametape, center it on the top of the pocket and then fold under the ends so



the fold on each end is even with the end of the pockets. NOW you can trim off the excess that is behind the nametape (hint: longer is slightly better, don't cut off too much!) Keep those ends folded under when you sew them down... This will prevent fraying, which looks terrible and ruins the nametag.

Boots – These are always an issue with growing feet. The boots with the canvas uppers, so-called “jungle boots,” are a good, cheap alternative, but they don't work well in a cold climate. All-leather boots are year-round but can be expensive. Initially, buy boots about ½ size larger and have your cadet wear thick socks.

Shoe & boot polish – Regular old black Kiwi polish works the best. Period. Leave that sham shine, pastes, liquids and treatments behind. Elbow grease & Kiwi will win the day. Your cadet will learn the techniques during their basic training, but it may take time to get a good base going on the shoes or boots. Bear with his or her tribulations. Watch out for “blackfinger” (caused by shoe polish on the end of the finger) causing problems on the furniture! (*We're not kidding, either!*)

Doodads (insignia) – Help find a place for your cadet to stash these things when they're off his or her uniform... They go missing very easily. (Replacing them, while helping the economy is not something you want to do very often). Don't wash the uniform with them still attached.

Dry cleaning – Basically everything dark blue (trousers, tie, flight cap, service coat, etc) has to be dry cleaned, not washed. Do not get the “Military Press” option when having your shirts dry cleaned. They will be returned with all sorts of extra creases you will need to iron out. Military press is something the Marine Corps and law enforcement have done to their uniforms.

Hemming – Flood pants are out! The best hem is obtained with the pants worn correctly (above the hip bones) and evenly, with a belt & shoes. Mark the front of the trousers at the point where the crease just touches the shoe around the laces. Add 5/8” to this and that's the hem length for the back of the trousers. This angled hem is called a “West Point cut.”

Your cadet will receive books and manuals which have guidelines in them on many of these items. They will be tested on them as part of their training and advancement. Don't hesitate to remind them that they can often find answers to their questions in the book. Once again, we want them to learn responsibility so please don't do their homework for them.

COMMUNICATIONS

We all know that communications is a two way street. We have several methods that we use for trying to get information home so you know what is going on. The previously mentioned “chain of command” is used to pass information about issues of an immediate nature (i.e. an emergency change to the meeting, or a last-minute check on who can attend a weekend event). Your cadet's element leader or flight sergeant may call to find out if your cadet is planning on attending an activity or meeting (we call that a *call down*.)



Many units have a website where you can go and see what new and exciting things are going on, and this generally includes a calendar. We do have a squadron website. <http://sq50.cawg.cap.gov> is the address to our squadron site. We also have a Yahoo Group. Membership in the Yahoo Group is automatic as long as you provide an email address to the squadron. Both locations contain frequently used forms, announcements and a calendar of events. Our National Headquarters at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama also has a website with tons of useful links, like lists of national activities, CAP regulations, and every CAP form you'll ever need. So take a look and visit <http://www.gocivilairpatrol.com>.



We also use email to pass information back and forth if cadets have email addresses. The important thing here is there are many avenues of getting the word out.

Occasionally, the unit sends out electronic updates. Anyone and everyone who has an email address will receive these updates. It will tell your cadet everything to expect at upcoming meetings and what to look forward to in the coming month. For those who don't have email, the squadron roster is there to be used. And if you, as a parent, wish to receive any squadron correspondence, simply e-mail the deputy commander for cadets and we'll include you on the list.

However, the buck stops and starts with your cadet. If they don't get a call or need more information about something they should contact their element leader (that pesky chain of command thing again!) to get more information. So, we should never hear the famous words of spoke to Paul Newman in Cool Hand Luke, “What we have here is a failure to communicate”.



DEADLINES AND TIMELINESS



We have repeated several times that we are teaching responsibility and leadership. As with uniform infractions, we hold your cadet responsible for meeting agreed upon deadlines for things and for being on time to activities. We know that most 12 year olds don't drive yet and it has been our experience that many don't know how to tell time (well we know they can do it since you can't get out of third grade unless you can, they just seem to have selective memory about certain things). We

will do our best to start and end things on time. We expect everyone to show up before we start things. Please do your best to keep your cadet out of trouble by planning enough time to get them to the meeting on time. They probably won't thank you, but we do!

ACTIVITIES

On a regular basis, the unit has activities and events outside the regular meetings. In general, there are two times when we'll require something more from you than just the regular "see ya, mom." That's overnight or out of the area activities. You'll see these events on the unit calendar. There's no such thing as a "secret search & rescue mission" in our outfit. However, those cadets who are qualified to respond to emergency services missions, may get a call one weekend asking them to report for a mission. It may be real, or may not. This doesn't happen often, but it's not unheard of either.

For overnights or events well outside our local area, we'll have an emergency contact form that each cadet is required to carry. You may want to take a look at this, as it will have critical information that we'll need in the event of an emergency. It's called a CAP Form 60, "Emergency Notification Data". It's CAP's version of the *Dog Tag*.

When we go on activities, we usually have a time when things start (or when we're departing for another location) and a time when things are over (or when we'll be back). When it comes to the start/departure times, those things are usually driven by other issues (facilities, personnel availability, etc). If we're departing Sharpe Depot for another place,

there are many people who are counting on that departure time. Just one person being late can throw everything into disarray. Please help us by being as on-time as possible. A little early never hurt, either. There is a saying in the military, "if you're on time, you're late".

And we can appreciate how busy you are, and we'll do our best to hit the published end time or arrival times.



The potential exceptions to this, of course, are flying activities and events that involve a long trip to/from. Flying activities are heavily weather dependent and may not start just when we want them to, or may not end exactly at the right time, either. We'd ask that everybody understand that we conduct our flight operations in the safest manner possible, and weather is one of those safety factors that we have to contend with. As for long-distance trips, well, sometimes even we get stuck in traffic jams. Please make sure your cadet has a few things at all times: your cell phone number, work number, and a key to get into their own house. More than a few times we've had to sit out front of a cadet's house waiting for a parent to get home.

We'll do our best to let you know we're going to be late if we know it in advance, but we try pretty hard to be realistic in our scheduling when we plan events that involve travel or flying. Better to spend 15 minutes cooling our heels at HQ because we miscalculated and arrived a little early than make everybody wait 15 minutes.

If your cadet has ways of getting in touch with you in the event we're going to be late, it would be most helpful. So make sure they know your cell or work number. With today's technology, it's easier than ever to keep folks in the loop.

PARENT QUESTIONS

If you as a parent have questions, the staff of the Squadron is always available to you to answer them. We share the same goal that is to help your cadet become the outstanding person that you want them to be, even if they don't think they can. The cadet program is one of the best programs around to teach young men and women about leadership and responsibility; working together we can make a big difference in your cadet's future.