

## Membership Issues at the Group Level

**Lesson Objective:** Commanders will understand the progression of discipline to adjust behavior of a senior member or cadet, up to and including revocation of Civil Air Patrol Membership.

**Desired Learning Outcomes (DLO):**

1. Discuss and understand the progression of discipline as it relates to Senior Members and Cadets.
2. Discuss the proper way to discipline a member and document adverse actions against a member.
3. Discuss and understand the procedures to remove a member from Civil Air Patrol IAW CAPR 35.3.
4. Discuss and understand the purpose of a Commanders Directed Investigation (CDI).

**Scheduled Lesson Time:** 30 Minutes

**Introduction:** Civil Air Patrol members are our greatest assets, but what happens when one of those members starts to seem more like a liability? All volunteer organizations must walk a fine line between helping members find a home within the organization and preventing a member from detracting from the mission or others' experiences. Civil Air Patrol membership is a privilege, not a right. Ideally unit membership boards will approve (or disapprove) new members' applications after three visits, and in most cases, these members become excellent contributors to our ranks. From time to time, however, there are members who do not follow regulations, violate core values, and disrupt unit morale and cohesiveness. How should a commander at any echelon handle such a member?

### ***Warning Signs***

The goal is for every member to find a place within the organization where they can provide valuable contributions. Virtually all difficult members originally joined CAP to serve, and believe in our mission. As leaders, we may be able to recognize warning signs that a member is headed in a bad direction. While there are several ways to think about warning signs, for this lesson, consider them in terms of relationships. The following warning signs are found in senior members, but many of the same concepts apply to cadets.

***Relationships with Other Senior Members:*** CAP is not a fraternal organization or a social group, but successful members still find a sense of belonging. Members must build relationships with one another. If a member does not seem to mesh with the unit, they might be struggling to find that sense of belonging and will likely become frustrated over time. These members might consistently seem reserved around others, struggle to find aircrew to fly with, or seem to arrive at and leave meetings and events discreetly. While it is not a leader's job to ensure everyone finds friendship, recognizing that a member seems isolated and helping them make a connection with a mentor or peer will help them become an asset for the unit.

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***Relationships with Cadets:*** The relationship between seniors and cadets is unique. To maintain a healthy cadet program, we must be vigilant of how a senior member interacts with cadets. Violations of CAP's Cadet Protection Policy are not acceptable. In many instances, certain grey area behaviors can indicate an unhealthy membership. For example, perhaps a senior member is pushing against the line between being a mentor and a friend with cadets. While senior members developing healthy relationships with cadets is a positive element of the program, a senior member who seems to focus almost entirely on cadets and fails to maintain healthy relationships with their fellow senior members may be of concern.

***Relationships with Leaders:*** Many unhealthy memberships are first noticed by their relationships with leadership. We can likely all think of a member who we know will find a flaw in any plan or regularly disrupt meetings. Commanders in a volunteer force generally find they have more responsibility than they have authority. In this setting, your ability to lead depends almost entirely on developing relationships with your members and motivating them. Is there a member you have not spoken to recently? Do you know what kind of individual goals a member has? While formal goal setting is appropriate in some settings, knowing even a little about what matters to a member can go a long way to helping them find their best fit within the unit.

***Relationship with the Organization:*** As we continually strive to improve as an organization, it is often healthy to discuss areas we can improve. There is a difference, however, between discussing ways to improve and excessive negativity for negativity's sake. When a member identifies a problem, do they propose a solution, or do they just complain? Are they willing to accept their role in the success of the organization, or do they blame others for things they see as beyond their control? A member who is consistently or excessively negative can bring down the morale and efficacy of those around them. Early recognition of such negativity can help change the trajectory of a member's experience.

### ***Progressive Discipline***

Progressive discipline is the process through which we address troublesome members and administer corrective interventions. This process should be progressive, consistent, timely, respectful, and carried out with the goal of re-engaging a member in mind. The goal of progressive discipline is to change or modify behavior of a member; if their behavior does not change after one action, progressing to the next step may prove more effective. Disciplinary steps start with verbal counseling and can ultimately escalate to membership termination. Documenting each step is crucial.

1. **Verbal Counseling:** Counseling is the mildest form of discipline, but often the most effective. Counseling can also be thought of as *coaching*, since our goal is to work with members not only to identify the problem, but also frame a solution. These conversations should always be held in person, with an impartial witness. Commanders should follow up on the conversation with an email or letter to document the conversation and convey that the need to change course truly matters. If available, a CAP Chaplain is also a great resource for a counseling conversation.

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2. **Letters of Reprimand:** A letter of reprimand is more formal. While the specifics are largely left to the commander's discretion, a well-written letter of reprimand will clearly detail the conduct or sustained nonperformance of concern. Commanders should explicitly state what is expected of the member, and that continuing problematic behavior may be grounds for further disciplinary action. All such letters should ask the recipient to acknowledge receipt. Hopefully, such a letter will make it clear to a member that their behavior or performance needs to change, but if it does not, these letters provide the basis for more severe membership action.
3. **Demotion of Grade:** Demotion is a serious action designed to alter a member's behavior in the hopes that they can remain a member of the organization. Documentation of concerns will be required and most often comes in the form of multiple letters of reprimand. Demotions are discussed in CAPR 52-16. If you are considering a demotion, you should discuss the matter with your higher commander and their personnel officer.
4. **Suspension of flight privileges:** While more operational in nature, a flight suspension can address operational, administrative, or safety concerns. These suspensions, discussed in CAPR 70-1, have different rules than membership suspensions, and notably should include a path to reinstated privileges if possible.
5. **Suspension:** Suspension is a restrictive action reserved for instances where there is serious concern about the actions of a member, but the commander believes that a temporary separation from the organization will allow a member to change course. The goal is for a suspended member to return in good standing. During suspension, a member may not take part in any CAP activities and must surrender their ID card. In some instances, such as a Cadet Protection violation or allegation, membership suspension is *mandatory* while the matter is investigated. If you are considering a membership suspension or are unsure if a suspension is required, you should contact your commander and your wing's legal officer for advice. It will be particularly important to document your actions leading up to and during the decision to suspend a member.
6. **Termination:** The most formal and stringent adverse membership action, termination is reserved for actions truly incompatible with our organization or a prolonged pattern of problematic behavior that has made it incontrovertibly clear the member in question should no longer be affiliated with CAP. Thankfully, these actions are very rare. It is very important to thoroughly document the rationale for the action, including any previous letters of reprimand or documentation of counseling. The absence of such documentation can delay or prevent you from taking the action you need to take. If you are considering a suspension or termination, you should consult your next higher echelon commander and your wing's legal officer. These consultations and clear documentation are critical to protecting yourself and the organization.

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#### ***Appeal***

A member has the right to appeal certain membership actions, including demotion, prolonged suspension, and termination. A more complete understanding of appeals can be gained through CAPR 35-8 and consulting with the legal officer. Commanders should be aware that a member must submit an appeal within 60 days, a formal review panel will be convened, and your records concerning the matter will be requested. Your initial responsibility is to forward any appeal up your chain of command. Commanders are given 30 days in which to respond, and the member has an additional 30 days to respond to the commander's response; a full appeal will take several months. This process can likely be mitigated or even avoided entirely through early, well documented counseling and appropriate progressive discipline.

#### ***Commanders Directed Investigations***

Commanders Directed Investigations (CDI) is the primary tool a commander can use to determine if or when something detrimental has occurred. The CDI can be used when a formal Inspection General Investigation is not warranted. This can be done at every level of command. The commander must assign an impartial investigator who can conduct the CDI objectively. Currently there is no guidance on the conduct of the CDI, but it is recommended the investigator complete the IG investigator course.

#### ***Case Studies***

1. **The Excessively Negative Member:** We had one member who stood out for being very negative about CAP and our squadron. He had been around for several years, and was often quick to describe how a project wasn't going to work or how CAP is falling behind the local search and rescue squad. Although he sometimes raised important points, his attitude was detrimental and dragged down morale. After it became clear he was inhibiting the squadron, I asked him if he could stay after a meeting one week for a few minutes. He and I stepped aside and spoke privately about how he felt about CAP. It was clear that he was pretty frustrated, but we talked about how he could help address some of his frustrations and avoid drag others down. He seemed to get what I was saying and was willing to change his attitude. I followed up after our talk with a quick email to say thanks for being open to conversation, and to say I looked forward to seeing him be a more positive influence in the unit. The conversation seems to have had an impact. Since then, the member has volunteered to lead a unit activity, held his tongue a bit more when he wasn't thrilled with a conversation, and helped mentor a couple of new members through Level I and GES. I'm glad we were able to address this head on, and hope there will be no need to escalate this further.
2. **The Cadet's Best Friend:** We have great cadets in our program, and we get to know them well. However, we must be aware of lines not to cross. I noticed one of my seniors who always seemed to be talking to the cadets and didn't really seem to mesh with the other seniors. While I did not see any cadet protection violations, and most conversations were program-appropriate (for example, talking to cadets about staff selection or their next promotion board), some conversations about senior members and

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leadership did not seem completely appropriate. She wasn't approaching cadets as a mentor or coach, but more like a peer. I tried counseling this senior several times about how to cultivate the kind of relationships we're looking for, but I don't think I got through. The member seemed resistant. This member was very involved with almost every cadet activity, so it was hard to suggest she may need to change her interactions with cadets. I suggested the member attend an upcoming TLC being held by Group, but she didn't seem interested. Over time, these problems compounded. She would contradict and undermine leadership, and cut herself off from most of the other seniors. Eventually, my CDC and I came to realize that she was probably not a good fit for CAP. We talked about potentially moving her to another role, but we doubted she'd be receptive. I spoke with my Group CC about membership termination. He was happy to talk about the situation, but we faced a few stumbling blocks. I had not documented my counseling attempts and had not yet written a formal letter of reprimand, so we anticipated some push back at terminating her membership. I did write a letter of reprimand, specifying what behaviors were concerning, mentioning that we had discussed it several times, and discussed what could change. Unfortunately, the letter was not well received. The member acknowledged receipt and expressed her disdain, and it was clear she felt angry and threatened. After an uncomfortable unit meeting, she informed me that she would be resigning. I got the impression she was expecting me to be upset and try to get her to stay, but I simply told her I understood, told her how to formally resign, and thanked her for all she had done for the unit. It was not an easy process and I hope I don't have to do it again, but if I do, I would document counseling attempts from the start and perhaps involve a chaplain to try and avoid reaching the breaking point, where both leadership and the member felt her membership was not in her best interest or the best interest of the organization.

3. **The Bored Member:** Recruiting a member often involves getting them excited about what they can do in CAP. Unfortunately, our ops tempo is often a little slower than what they are expecting. We had a member who was excited to join and hit the training hard. They qualified as an MS, MO, and UDF within their first year, but in their second year got bored quickly. I certainly understood their frustration. They signed up for every exercise they could and were quick to offer their availability for missions, but were only utilized in about half of them. In talking to them, it was clear they were getting frustrated, as they had trained hard and invested a lot of time in getting qualified. They were most excited about ES, but we also discussed opportunities to contribute in AE, CP, and support roles. ES was the main component that attracted them to the organization, but our activations are generally few and far between. To keep them engaged, I thought it was important to help them find other homes in the unit and build connections with other members. On the whole, I'd say this was successful. The member got helped teach a few AE classes, chaperoned a cadet activity, and helped with some fundraising. Their activity level slowed. He no longer comes to every meeting and he doesn't sign up for as many exercises and events, but he stays qualified. I appreciate the time he can offer and that he is a resource if we need him. I hope that in the future we can find more ways for him to stay involved, and of course, I hope we get called for more missions.

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**Lesson Summary and Closure**

Membership in Civil Air Patrol is a privilege and not a right. We want our members to have a home in our units and have a sense of fulfillment, but there will be times a member becomes disgruntled, frustrated, or belligerent. Commanders need to keep good order and discipline in the unit using progressive discipline. In these situations, be sure to document actions taken and have frank conversations with the wing legal officer.

**Assignment:**

1. Prepare and discuss negative member situations that you are aware of, and how they were handled. Do you agree with what was done? If not, how would you handle it?
2. Name a situation or event that you think would warrant a CDI.