Introduction

Acting-out behavior manifests itself in many different ways in classroom and school settings including running away, physical aggression, verbal abuse, serious confrontations and threats, sexual acting out, criminal behavior such as vandalism, defiance and noncompliance, tantrums, and many different forms of anger. While these behaviors may differ in their form, settings, and outcomes, there are several common factors. For example, different students who have anger toward their parents or particular teachers may act out by skipping school, vandalizing shops in the neighborhood, or becoming hostile toward their teachers and getting suspended from school. Clearly, each of these behaviors is different, but they are all motivated by anger toward their parents or teachers. Other students may become depressed, lose their confidence, become sexually active, stop eating, or give up on their schoolwork. Again, the responses are very different, yet each student is attempting to deal with depression, albeit in ways that are essentially self-destructive and very counterproductive.

In this book, acting-out behavior will be used along with other descriptors for students displaying serious problem behavior—especially explosive and escalating behavior. Other descriptors sometimes applied to students with these problems include antisocial, behaviorally disordered, emotionally disturbed, emotionally and behaviorally disordered, socially maladjusted high-needs students, or simply troubled students. Regardless of the labels, acting-out behavior can be serious and must be handled in a thoughtful and purposeful manner with a focus on the behaviors being exhibited and the context and conditions under which they occur.

The book is divided into four sections. The first section provides the logic and rationale for considering a proactive approach to behavior wherein the role of the teacher is to maximize student success within both academic and social curricula. The purpose of the second section is to describe the development and detail of a conceptual model for acting-out behavior. An analysis of an acting-out behavioral cycle is presented followed by a description of a model comprised of seven clearly defined phases. Common behavioral features are delineated for each phase in the

model, which allows staff to develop a specific behavior profile for a student with acting-out behavior problems. Once this profile, or assessment, has been made, staff is in a strong position to develop a comprehensive behavior plan to interrupt the cycle of acting-out behavior and to establish appropriate behavior.

The third section, which constitutes the bulk of the book, is devoted to an explanation and description of many strategies for managing each of the seven phases in the acting-out cycle.

The strategies selected are taken from research and best practice procedures reported as effective in the literature and practiced in the field. Because each phase represents a link in the behavioral chain, staff's effective management of behaviors in the early phases of the behavior chain may preempt the later phases where more serious problems occur. In the latter phases, the approach is to stress safety, crisis management, reentry, and follow-up procedures.

In the fourth and final section, procedures for managing the cycle of acting-out behavior are summarized followed by a case study. The case study is presented to illustrate the assessment features paired with strategies for each phase in the acting-out cycle.

The reader is referred to an appendix section at the back of the book. This section contains all of the forms presented throughout the book. These forms may be reproduced or adapted for personal use in the classroom.