

Introduction

The student is in his seat, staring out the window. He suddenly throws his books against the wall, and now is approaching you in a threatening manner with his fists clenched at his side. This has all transpired in about 3 seconds. You did not anticipate this happening, and now all you have time to do is react. What do you do?

Have you ever taught students who were physically aggressive toward others and also destroyed property? Has a student ever attempted to (or succeeded in) punching you, kicking you, scratching you, pulling your hair, spitting on you, or throwing something at you? If this has ever happened to you, you are not alone. There are increasing references to “battered teacher syndrome” in the educational literature (Goldstein, Palumbo, Striepling, & Voutsinas, 1995), and teachers across the country are injured, sometimes severely, during student acting out episodes.

Remember those incidents in your career. Did you safely manage the situation? Was anyone injured? Did you know what to do? Did the other teachers come to your assistance? Chances are this was one of the most difficult, frightening, frustrating, and dangerous situations in your career. If you have a student engaging in physical aggression toward others and/or destroying property, you have a huge problem. If these behaviors occur on a regular basis, the problem is compounded and the chances of you or your students getting injured increase.

Teachers often do not feel prepared to deal with these very serious behaviors; therefore, the behaviors can cause disruption to the classroom (at the least) or serious injury to others. It has become apparent that it is not just students with disabilities or emotional/behavioral disorders who engage in these health- and life-threatening responses, but that they may be evident in any student population.

In the following pages are procedures, protocols, and approaches that teachers may find useful in preventing, safely managing, and most importantly, teaching alternatives to these dangerous behaviors.