

# *Introduction to* Teaching Students With Emotional Disturbance

Mrs. Luanne Jones had been a second-grade teacher for 15 years. She had plenty of experience with students becoming angry when their needs were not met or when they were unable to do something; but teaching **Sandy** was different. Temper tantrums and sudden outbursts of anger that occurred when Sandy experienced frustration or failed to achieve a desired goal were a serious cause for concern in Mrs. Jones's class. Shouting obscenities, throwing things, screaming, crying, and trying to disrupt others were just a few of the ways Sandy would "throw a tantrum." Whatever form the tantrum took, it always interfered with productive interpersonal relationships and instruction.



**Terry** was a living legend at Magnolia Middle School. Everybody wondered what Terry would do next. Constantly asking questions, teasing other students, telling jokes, and generally disrupting the class were Terry's trademarks as a student.



Avoiding social interactions or failing to participate in social events was a way of life for **Bryce**. As is true for

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other isolated and withdrawn students, sometimes what Bryce did provoked rejection and exclusion by classmates and peers. Social isolation, shyness, or general social withdrawal interfered with productive interpersonal relationships, and Bryce was often depressed and unproductive in school; truancy and failing grades were becoming serious problems.

Students like Sandy, Terry, and Bryce are sometimes tough to teach because their behaviors interfere with productive interpersonal relationships. What they do violates expectations for what is accepted and causes concern for parents, teachers, and peers. For example, temper tantrums are common in very young students; but when they are part of the behavioral repertoire of older students and interfere with productive interpersonal relations, temper tantrums become serious behavior problems.

Disruptions are common during most school days. When one student is responsible for more than an expected or accepted number of disruptions, he or she may be considered to have a behavior problem. Similarly, when social withdrawal is occurring at an age when it is no longer considered appropriate and when it is adversely affecting school performance, it is a problem. Most teachers have at least one student with these kinds of behavior problems in their classrooms.