Justin seemed to delight in irritating Mr. Howe. Even the simplest request from Mr. Howe resulted in resistance from Justin. Although Mr. Howe initially dealt with Justin's resistance by trying to cajole, convince, or bribe him to comply, he was losing patience with Justin. Now, when Justin refused to do something, Mr. Howe became angry and quickly threatened him in front of the class, which Justin seemed to enjoy even more.

Mr. Howe realized that he was playing into Justin's hands and contacted the school's prereferral team, which included Ms. Douglas, a special educator who had worked with Justin and his family. The team collected information about Justin and his behavior. They analyzed several recent incidents to identify the actions of Justin and Mr. Howe that precipitated and maintained their power struggles. Justin’s family also discussed how they use routines and how they structure transitions to avoid confrontations with him at home. On the basis of this information, the team concluded that Justin truly enjoyed his confrontations with Mr. Howe. The team then collaborated with Mr. Howe to create a plan to try to reduce Justin’s power struggles. They determined which classroom rules were nonnegotiable and what the consequences would be for violating them. They used these rules to establish a home-school contract with Justin’s family. They also discussed ways for Mr. Howe to change his instructional techniques to motivate Justin and involve him in the learning process and in monitoring his own behavior.

Mr. Howe also tried to change his demeanor and facial expressions with Justin. He calmly gave Justin brief, easy-to-follow directions and provided him with some choices. If Justin resisted, Mr. Howe briefly listened to Justin’s explanation and either discussed it privately with him or quickly exited the situation. When Justin complied with Mr. Howe’s requests, Mr. Howe occasionally and privately acknowledged this behavior by employing quick walk-by reinforcement such as a gesture, whisper, or pat on the back or left a note for Justin to find later in the day.

Educators like Mr. Howe teach a range of students with special needs, including students who exhibit oppositional and defiant behaviors (Jenson, 2001; Woolsey-Terrazas & Chavez, 2002). Such students engage in a variety of behaviors designed to resist the requests of authority figures. These behaviors often interfere with school performance (see box, “Oppositional and Defiant Behaviors”).

Teachers must be knowledgeable about the unique characteristics of their students so that they can plan and implement educational programs that address the students’ individual strengths and needs. This article uses the experiences of Mr. Howe and Ms. Douglas to provide suggestions for understanding and addressing the difficulties associated with educating students who exhibit oppositional and defiant behaviors (see box, “Labeling Students”). Although this article presents these suggestions in the context of promoting the learning of students who engage in oppositional and defiant behaviors, they can be used to support the learning of all students.

Oppositional Behaviors

Students who exhibit oppositional and defiant behaviors engage in a persistent pattern of manipulative or noncompliant behavior. These behaviors, which occur frequently for a minimum of 6 months, may include a combination of the following:
- Refusing to comply with rules.
- Blaming or arguing with others.
- Losing their temper.
- Being easily angered, frustrated, and annoyed.
- Cursing and using inappropriate language.
- Having low self-esteem.
- Appearing to enjoy annoying and bothering others.
- Seeking attention (Jenson, 2001; Woolsey-Terrazas & Chavez, 2002).
Labeling Students

Educators have recently used the term “oppositional defiance disorder” to describe the oppositional and defiant behaviors of students; however, educators need to be aware of the problems associated with labeling students. Such terms as “oppositional defiance disorder” locate problems within students rather than within the educational system. These labels can also limit the way that others perceive and interact with students, thereby disabling the students academically and hindering the development of their self-esteem. Educators must recognize that no two students are alike and that each educational program must be based on individual strengths and behavioral challenges rather than on a label.

These 14 suggestions are as follows:

- Access prereferral services.
- Encourage family collaboration and communication.
- Collect assessment data and perform a functional behavioral assessment.
- Address students’ learning and motivational difficulties.
- Provide social skills instruction.
- Offer attribution training.
- Build relationships with students.
- Develop students’ self-esteem.
- Give students choices.
- Be aware of verbal and nonverbal communication.
- Teach students to use self-management interventions.
- Follow routines and foster transitions.
- Establish and teach rules.
- Learn more about oppositional and defiant behaviors.

We next discuss these suggestions in detail.

Access Prereferral Services

Prereferral services are an essential resource for teachers like Mr. Howe and students like Justin. Prereferral services—sometimes called a teacher assistance team, an instructional support team, or a child study team—are part of a preventive problem-solving process that can assist classroom teachers in addressing challenging students before the teacher needs to refer the student for a special education placement (Ormsbee, 2001). The prereferral team gathers information to develop a plan to help the teacher successfully teach the student. The team determines prereferral interventions on the basis of the individual student’s strengths and challenges; his or her educational, social, and medical history; and his or her language and cultural background, as well as the teacher’s concerns and the nature of the learning environment. In the situation of Justin and Mr. Howe, the team can work collaboratively with teachers and family members to develop a plan that includes a range of methods.

Encourage Family Collaboration and Communication

As the example of Justin and Mr. Howe indicates, good collaboration and communication with students’ families can strengthen the connection between school and home and create a shared commitment to learning (Salend, 2005). Therefore, educators should view families as a valuable resource and partner in the educational process and should include them in the prereferral process. Since members of a student’s family can share useful information about how they manage the child’s behavior at home, families can help the team understand the student. Family members also can collaborate with educators to implement interventions to foster students’ positive behavior. For example, an effective intervention for students who exhibit oppositional and defiant classroom behaviors is a home-school contract in which teachers communicate with the student’s family regarding behavior in school and families reinforce the child’s improved behavior. Before implementing a home-school contract, all parties should discuss and agree on the specifics of the contract. When the system is in place, follow-up communication regarding its implementation and effectiveness is also essential.

Collect Assessment Data and Perform a Functional Behavioral Assessment

During the assessment process, the prereferral team collects data needed to identify and develop a plan to address the student’s academic and social behaviors. The team uses these data to examine existing learning and behavioral patterns and to identify the extent to which other factors (e.g., experiential and cultural factors, unsettling family events, and variables related to the instructional program) may explain the difficulties that the student is experiencing in school. In developing these profiles and making these determinations, educators take measurements in a variety of areas, including the student’s behavior in the classroom and at home, as well as his or her academic performance, social relationships, learning preferences, emotional status, and communication skills.

Since oppositional and defiant behavior may vary depending on the environment, examining the student’s behavioral patterns at school and at home is important. Educators can collect this information in a variety of ways:

- Direct observation of students in a variety of settings can provide insights into behavioral and academic skills, as well as the student’s interactions with others.
- Educators can record measurements of behavioral and social skills by completing checklists, rating scales, and questionnaires related to a range of skills.

Good collaboration and communication with students’ families can strengthen the connection between school and home and create a shared commitment to learning.
of behaviors in a variety of settings (Taylor, 2000).

- Interviews, sociograms, and self-concept measures—in addition to an examination of school records and documents indicating the number and types of discipline referrals, behavioral incidents, and interruptions—can provide supplemental data.

- An assessment of student behavior should also include a functional behavioral assessment, or FBA (Murdick, Gartin, & Stockall, 2003; see box, “What Is a Functional Behavior Assessment?”).

In addition to assessing students' behavioral and social skills, educators can develop academic performance profiles by using standardized criterion-referenced and norm-referenced testing. Such assessment techniques as performance-based and portfolio assessment, curriculum-based measurement, rubrics, dynamic assessment, learning logs, and self-evaluation can help provide more complete profiles of students and can identify their academic strengths, needs, and learning styles, as well as the impact of these factors on learning and behavior (Salend, 2005).

**Address Students' Learning and Motivational Difficulties**

The learning and motivational difficulties of students can affect their behavior. Teachers can use innovative and motivating differentiated teaching practices to minimize resistance behaviors that are related to these difficulties. A variety of teaching strategies, instructional technologies, and curricular approaches can accommodate students' individual learning strengths, preferences, and styles, as well as their experiential, cultural, and language backgrounds (Salend, 2005).

Providing students with access to meaningful, interesting, and challenging curricula and age-appropriate and creative instructional programs is also a critical factor in establishing a learning environment that helps students and motivates them to succeed (Tomlinson, 2002). Educators can enhance student motivation by using high-interest activities, relevant and integrated content, and culturally relevant topics and instructional materials that relate to students' lives (Kern, Bambara, & Fogt, 2002). Teachers can share with students why the content, process, and products associated with learning activities are worthwhile for them. They can use student-directed learning to help students become involved in instruction and gain a sense of ownership in their education, thereby increasing students' motivation, self-efficacy, and learning (Brown, 2002).

Learning activities that students enjoy, that pique their curiosity, and that use novelty can also motivate students. Suspense, fantasy, color, and technology can arouse student interest. In developing classroom examples and assignments, educators can use the students' interests and experiences, as well as popular characters, items, and trends. Active academic games are another way to incorporate novelty into the instructional process. These games should be cooperative rather than competitive and should be structured to involve all students.

**Provide Social Skills Instruction**

Justin and students like him often lack social skills and can therefore benefit from social skills instruction. Social skills teaching helps students learn how to work in groups, make friends, and recognize and respond appropriately to the feelings of others. It also can help them resolve conflicts; understand their own strengths, challenges, and emotions; and deal with frustration and anger (Morris, 2002).

By clearly explaining the desired behavior, its importance, and when it should be used, teachers can help students develop their social skills. Teachers also can demonstrate, explain, role-play, and practice using the behavior, in addition to providing students with numerous opportunities to use it in natural settings with peers (Lo, Loe, & Cartledge, 2002). Teachers can provide feedback, employ cues to promote the use of social skills in various settings, and teach their students to use learning strategies that foster social interactions (Bock, 2003; Presley & Hughes, 2000).

Teachers also teach social skills by using social skills curricula, literature, and student reflection. Williams and Reisberg (2003) and Elksnin and Elksnin (1998) provide a list of resources that can assist in teaching social skills to students. Students can work in groups to read, discuss, and role-play juvenile literature around the theme of social skills (Cartledge & Kiarie, 2001; Gut & Safran, 2002). To encourage students to reflect on their social skills, teachers can ask them to respond to the following questions:

- What did you do to get along with others?
- How well did it work?
- How do you think the others felt about what you did?
- What did you learn from this experience? (Church, Gottschalk, & Leddy, 2003)

**Offer Attribution Training**

Students who exhibit oppositional and defiant behaviors can benefit from attribution training, which involves teaching them to understand how their actions affect their success and failure. By offering attribution training, teachers can help students develop the belief that their actions affect their success. This understanding can in turn minimize the extent to which the students blame others for their own difficulties. Students
who understand positive attributions recognize and acknowledge that their successful performance is because of effort, ability, and other factors within themselves; however, students who fail to understand attribution often attribute their difficulties to others and to external factors.

Teachers can use a variety of strategies to help students learn to use positive attributions (Salend, 2005). They can assess and foster their students' positive attributions by teaching them to use attribution self-report scales and dialogue pages. For example, after instructional activities, teachers can give students an attribution scale to rate the level of difficulty of the task, their effort, and the factors that contributed to their success (Corral & Antia, 1997). Similarly, students can respond to dialogue pages that ask them what they did to succeed, why they succeeded, what prevented them from succeeding, and what they can do to be even more successful (Kozminsky & Kozminsky, 2002). In addition, educators can teach their students to do the following:

- Understand how attributions and effort affect performance.
- View failure as the first part of learning and a sign of the need to work harder.
- Focus on improvement and analyze past successes.
- Talk about mistakes and assume responsibility for successful outcomes.

Teachers can also encourage students to use positive attributions by modeling them, having students self-record them, responding to students' correct responses with effort feedback ("You're really working hard") or ability feedback ("You have the skill to do this"), and by responding to students' incorrect responses with a strategy or informational feedback ("Try another way of doing this") (Corral & Antia, 1997; Yasutake, Bryan, & Dohrn, 1996).

**Build Relationships With Students**

Although building meaningful and genuine relationships with and among all students is essential, it is an especially important factor in teaching students like Justin. Teachers can facilitate relationships with students by creating a learning environment that is based on mutual respect and by learning about what is important to their students. They can foster relationships with their students outside, as well as inside, the classroom by attending extracurricular activities in which their students participate and by connecting classroom activities with students' interests and hobbies.

Teachers also can build relationships with their students by establishing and maintaining rapport with them. Teachers can establish rapport by:

- Talking to students about topics that interest them.
- Showing an interest in students' personal lives.
- Sharing their own interests.
- Giving emotional support.
- Letting students perform activities in which they excel.
- Greeting students by name.
- Recognizing special events in students' lives, such as birthdays.
- Displaying kindness.
- Spending informal time with students.
- Complimenting students (Owens & Dieker, 2003).

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**Students who fail to understand attribution often attribute their difficulties to others and to external factors.**

In addition to defusing difficult classroom situations, humor can help teachers and their students develop a good relationship and create a positive classroom atmosphere (Duckworth et al., 2001). A teacher who effectively uses humor can help put students at ease, gain their attention, and help them see teachers as individuals. However, when a teacher uses humor, he or she must be certain that it is not directed toward students as ridicule or sarcasm; that students do not misinterpret it; and that it is free of racial, ethnic, religious, sexual, or gender bias and connotations. To use humor appropriately and strategically, teachers also need to be aware of events in the students' lives, their schools, and the world.

**Develop Students' Self-Esteem**

Helping students develop their self-esteem is another way for teachers to establish a positive learning environment. Teachers can help develop self-esteem by giving students opportunities to demonstrate their competence to others and to perform skills, roles, and jobs that others value (Jones, 2002). Teachers also can foster their students' self-esteem by listening to them; showing them that they value the students' ideas, opinions, interests, and skills; and involving them in the decision-making process. Other methods include recognizing students' achievements and talents, teaching them to use self-management techniques, asking them to perform meaningful classroom and school-based jobs, and posting their work in the classroom and throughout the school (Pavri, 2001).

Acknowledging positive aspects of students' behaviors can promote self-esteem in students and can strengthen the bond between teachers and their students (Hester, 2002). Educators should tailor these comments to students' ages, skill levels, and cultural backgrounds. Educators should recognize effort, as well as specific behaviors and outcomes, and should acknowledge the individual achievements of students rather than comparing their performance with that of others.

**Give Students Choices**

Educators can lessen power struggles with students by allowing them to make choices. Such choices can also foster their self-esteem. Since students may initially have difficulty making choices, teaching them how to make and express their choices is important, in addition to
Acknowledging positive aspects of students' behaviors can promote self-esteem in students and can strengthen the bond between teachers and their students.

helping them understand the consequences of their choices (Cook-Sather, 2003). Teachers can also facilitate the choice-making process by providing students with options and by allowing them to make some choices during nonacademic activities. During instructional activities, teachers can give students choices regarding the order in which they begin and complete assignments, the instructional materials that they will use, the classroom places where they will work, and the classmates with whom they would like to collaborate (Jolivette, Stichter, & McCormick, 2002).

Be Aware of Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

Both verbal and nonverbal communications affect teachers' relationships with their students. When students and teachers do not understand these communications, the resulting miscommunication can escalate conflicts between students and teachers. Therefore, verbal and nonverbal communication should foster positive interactions, should be consistent with students' behavioral expectations, and should communicate attitudes. For example, Mr. Howe learned to use facial expressions and eye contact to communicate to Justin his approval, interest, concern, and warmth. In responding to students, teachers should be sensitive to the nonverbal behaviors of their students and should interact with them by using congruent and culturally appropriate nonverbal and verbal messages. As Mr. Howe realized, teachers also should try to avoid making threats, using body language that communicates disapproval, and responding emotionally during confrontations.

Teachers can use verbal and nonverbal cues as physical gestures to prompt and acknowledge prosocial behavior (Marks et al., 2003). These cues also can establish routines, promote efficiency, or signal to students that their behavior is unacceptable and should be changed. For example, as Mr. Howe discovered, educators can use individualized eye contact, hand signals, head movements, and notes to quickly and covertly indicate affirmation, correction, or the need to refocus on appropriate behavior. When teachers work with students from different cultural and language backgrounds, using cues that are culturally appropriate is important.

Teach Students to Use Self-Management Interventions

Because self-management strategies actively involve students in monitoring and changing their behaviors, they are especially good techniques for students like Justin to learn to use (Daly & Ranalli, 2003). Self-management strategies include the following:

- Self-monitoring, whereby students record their behaviors by using a data-collection system.
- Self-evaluation or self-assessment, whereby students learn to evaluate their in-class behavior according to some standard or scale.
- Self-reinforcement, whereby students are taught to evaluate their behavior and then deliver self-selected rewards if appropriate.
- Self-instruction, whereby students verbalize to themselves the questions and responses necessary to:
  - Identify problems ("What am I being asked to do?").
  - Generate potential solutions ("What are the ways to do it?").
  - Evaluate solutions (What is the best way?").
  - Use appropriate solutions ("Did I do it?").

- Determine whether the solutions are effective ("Does it work?").

Teachers can increase the effectiveness of these strategies by using combinations of them, by giving students numerous opportunities to practice and master them, and by prompting students to use them (King-Sears & Bonfils, 2000). The use of technology can further enhance the success of these strategies. For example, educators can teach students to use personal digital assistants and auditory-based technology systems to prompt themselves to demonstrate, self-record, self-evaluate, and self-reinforce their prosocial behaviors (Bauer & Ulrich, 2002; Post, Storey & Karabin, 2002). Students also can learn to use software packages to graph, store, access, and reflect on their progress in changing their behavior (Gunter, Miller, Venn, Thomas, & House, 2002).

Follow Routines and Foster Transitions

Since unexpected changes in classroom routines can cause students who exhibit oppositional and defiant behavior to act out and respond in defiant ways (Hall, Williams & Hall, 2000), following consistent and predictable routines and fostering transitions from one activity to another are important. When students know the routines and activities that they can expect in the classroom each day, they are more likely to believe that they are in control of their environment, which can reduce instances of defiance in the classroom.

Establishing and following a regular schedule that includes ongoing classroom routines can improve student learning and behavior (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2001; Hester, 2002). Good scheduling involves considering student characteristics as well as important features of the educational program and classroom. In establishing routines and schedules, it is generally helpful to:

- Begin the school day or classroom period with an activity that is motivating and interesting to students.
- Solicit input from students in planning routines and schedules.
• Post and review daily schedules and routines.
• Share an agenda for each of the day’s lessons.
• Coordinate schedules and routines with other professionals.
• Alert students in advance to changes in the routines and schedule.

An important aspect of the daily schedule and routines is making transitions from one activity to the next (Salend, 2005). When transitions occur within the classroom, students who exhibit oppositional and defiant behaviors may become frustrated and unclear about their place in the classroom, and they may therefore behave inappropriately. Teachers can use a variety of strategies to foster smooth and quick transitions. They can act like disk jockeys or newscasters who use segues to prepare listeners for the next recording or story. For example, teachers can provide verbal, musical, or physical cues as segues to signal to students that they need to prepare for a new activity and can give them specific directions for moving to the next activity (Gibson & Govendo, 1999; Hester, 2002). When students come from a less-structured social activity like lunch or recess to a setting that requires quiet and attention, educators can use a transitional activity. For example, following recess, the teacher can ask students to write in their journals one topic of discussion in a specific class on the previous day. Teachers also can minimize problems with transitions by allowing students to practice making transitions and teaching them to use learning strategies that facilitate transitions (Marks et al., 2003). For example, Babkie and Provost (2002) offer mnemonic-based learning strategies for helping students make transitions in hallways and school cafeterias.

Establish and Teach Rules

When working with students like Justin, establishing classroom rules and routines and fostering transitions from one activity to another are helpful techniques (Salend, 2005). Allowing students to be involved in developing the rules communicates to them that they

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### Important Internet Resources

**Big’s Place** ([www.bigsplace.com/ODD.html](http://www.bigsplace.com/ODD.html))
This site provides a variety of links to information on oppositional behaviors. The links are organized by category and include research, special medical programs, publications, and family support groups.

**Conduct Disorders.com** ([www.conductdisorders.com](http://www.conductdisorders.com))
This site, designed by families of challenging children, offers a variety of suggestions and alternatives for working with individuals with a variety of behavioral issues. It also provides suggestions for further reading, articles, links, and a discussion forum.

**Kwik Link Internet Services** ([www.klis.com/chandler/pamphlet/oddcd/oddcd-pamphlet.htm](http://www.klis.com/chandler/pamphlet/oddcd/oddcd-pamphlet.htm))
This site offers information, resources, and case studies related to students who exhibit oppositional behaviors and conduct disorders, as well as information on these behaviors and disorders in combination with such other issues as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, depression, substance abuse, and anxiety.

**Internet Mental Health** ([www.mentalhealth.com](http://www.mentalhealth.com))
This site disseminates research about a variety of mental health disorders. It offers an online encyclopedia that contains information on diagnosis, treatment, research, medications, and related links.

**Not My Kid.org** ([www.notmykid.org/parentArticles/ODD/default.htm](http://www.notmykid.org/parentArticles/ODD/default.htm))
This site offers information and resources on a variety of aspects related to oppositional behaviors, including symptoms from infancy to adolescence, suggestions and strategies for promoting positive behaviors, professional interventions, and a variety of ways to obtain further support and information.

**New York Online Access to Health** ([www.noah-health.org](http://www.noah-health.org))
This bilingual site (Spanish and English) contains facts about a wide variety of health issues and offers information on oppositional behaviors, including symptoms, treatment, advocacy, and resources.

**Kentucky.gov** ([www.state.ky.us/agencies/behavior/homepage.html](http://www.state.ky.us/agencies/behavior/homepage.html))
This site addresses a variety of behavioral issues and includes such helpful features as a question-and-answer forum, intervention strategies, links to the federal laws concerning individuals with disabilities, and professional organizations that provide current research.

This site provides a booklet containing information about the symptoms associated with oppositional and defiant behaviors, as well as helpful suggestions for making everyday life easier for all those involved.

**Global Internet** ([www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~ebdstudy/disord1/oppose.htm](http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~ebdstudy/disord1/oppose.htm))
This site outlines potential indicators related to oppositional and defiant behaviors and provides intervention strategies, including behavioral management, self-control instruction, self-esteem enhancement, and family education. It also presents information on the advantages and disadvantages of various strategies.
are responsible for their actions. Students also are more likely to follow rules that they help create. Therefore, teachers can work with students to develop reasonable rules that address cooperative and productive learning behaviors, guide classroom interactions, and are acceptable to students and teachers. For example, Mr. Howe can ask Justin and his classmates what rules they think the class needs. Present classroom problems, and ask students to brainstorm solutions and rules to address these problems; or Mr. Howe can have students create a classroom constitution or mission statement. Students also can provide suggestions regarding the consequences for following rules and the violations for breaking them.

Teachers can follow several guidelines to make classroom rules meaningful to their students. They can make sure that their rules are stated concisely in positive terms, that rules are easy to understand, and that they are usable in many situations and settings. Rules also should have some flexibility that is based on students' individual differences and circumstances. When exceptions to rules exist, teachers can identify the exceptions and discuss them in advance. Similarly, when teachers need to make allowances for students like Justin to accommodate their unique needs and behaviors, they should discuss and explain to the class the rationales for these allowances.

Helping students learn the rules is also important (Hester, 2002). Educators often need to describe and demonstrate the observable behaviors that make up the rules, give examples of rule violations and behaviors related to the rules, and role-play rule-following and rule-violating behaviors. Teachers and students can also discuss the rationale for the rules, the contexts in which rules apply, and the benefits of each rule. Teachers can review the rules frequently with the class at the beginning of the school year and periodically ask students to review or practice them. Teachers must also enforce the rules consistently, acknowledge students for following the rules, and offer positive corrective feedback to students who initially fail to comply so that they can succeed in the future.

Learn More About Oppositional and Defiant Behaviors

Special education is a field that is constantly changing. New research, model programs, teaching and classroom management strategies, and legislation related to such issues as students who exhibit oppositional and defiant behaviors are evolving. Since effective professionals strive to keep abreast of new developments and continue to develop their skills, teachers can engage in a variety of activities to learn more about these students. For example, teachers can read journal articles and books such as those in this article's reference list and can view Web sites (see box, "Important Internet Resources") that offer information and resources addressing issues related to students who exhibit oppositional and defiant behaviors.

Final Thoughts

The challenge of teaching requires educators to understand and address the unique characteristics of all students, including those who exhibit oppositional and defiant behaviors. Rather than focusing on students' labels, successful teaching requires that educators employ a variety of individualized assessment, instructional, collaboration, and classroom management strategies to promote learning and positive behavior. It also means that educators establish partnerships with families and other professionals to collaboratively plan, deliver, and monitor the effectiveness of educational programs. We hope this article will help educators respond to these challenges by presenting information to help them better understand and work more effectively with students who exhibit oppositional and defiant behaviors and their families.

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