1. Identify three types of antisocial behaviour and discuss their causes, prevalence, and differences across age and gender.

2. Provide examples of under-controlled and over-controlled behaviour, and discuss causes, prevalence, and differences across age and gender.

3. Explain why some students enter the school system with relatively low levels of diverse cognitive skills.

4. List eight types of diagnosed “high-incidence” disorders that result in at-risk behaviour, and discuss their causes, prevalence, and differences across age and gender.

5. Explain four protective factors that seem to guard against the adverse outcomes of at-risk behaviour.

6. Identify three ways that the learning experience can be maximized according to the universal design for learning (UDL) approach to inclusive education.

7. Identify Gardner’s eight common intelligences and discuss how they apply in a classroom setting.

8. Identify and discuss the three tiers of the response to intervention (RTI) approach to inclusive education.
PART 1: TYPES OF AT-RISK BEHAVIOUR

1. WHAT BEHAVIOURS PLACE A CHILD AT RISK IN THE CLASSROOM?

The school environment requires diverse skills from children and adolescents—not only cognitive skills, but equally important, social skills and self-management skills. And skills from all these areas need to be deployed together. To master a new classroom lesson, for example, requires not only a set of cognitive skills and the possession of relevant background information, it also requires that students actively cooperate with their teachers. This involves more than mere compliance. Students need to believe that the lesson is worth knowing. It is this belief that allows them to focus on the task, and that motivates them to apply the skills they already have, to persevere in the face of challenges and difficulties, to evaluate their own progress, and to ask for help when they need it. These same self-management skills are required to meet the challenges of the informal curriculum: to interact successfully with peers; to learn how to organize and sustain mutual play and to work together; and to negotiate differences and resolve conflicts in ways that are satisfying and useful—solutions that will work over the long term.

With the need for diverse skills come diverse problems. As we will see below, many different types of problems can disrupt successful functioning in the classroom and place students at risk for learning difficulties. Moreover, they often overlap, so that a student and teacher are confronted by a constellation of difficulties, not just a single problem. Aggressive children, for example, often have difficulty attending to and focusing on tasks, regulating their emotions, and maintaining positive social relationships with other children. Aggressive adolescents have to deal with academic failure; social rejection by nonaggressive, prosocial peers; the abrasive social relationships that exist in the deviant peer groups that do accept them; and, possibly, growing contact with police and the juvenile justice system (Farrington, 2005; Loeber & Hay, 1997). Although some problems affect children

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1 As Piaget noted, good students do not learn whatever they want, but want to learn whatever is presented (Smith, 2009).
2 Children are said to be “at risk” when they belong to an identifiable group that has a higher-than-average probability of an adverse outcome (in our case, academic difficulties and school failure). Often demographic variables (such as low income or Aboriginal status) are used to identify groups that are at risk. However, we have chosen not to focus on demographic variables because they are not direct causes in themselves. Rather, we will focus on behaviours (such as aggression) that have a direct impact on children’s interactions and learning in the classroom.
Students at Risk in the Classroom

and adolescents only as individuals, most often, given the social setting of the classroom, difficulties spill over and affect peers as well.

In the next section, we will briefly describe the types of behaviour that are most common and problematic in the classroom, and how they change over the course of development from primary to high school. We will then briefly consider the diverse types of causes that underlie these diverse behaviours, as well as some of the characteristics that they share. With this knowledge in hand, we will be able to consider classroom interventions.

A. ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOURS

Although antisocial behaviours are quite diverse (Frick et al., 1993), they share the defining characteristics of terminating social interactions and disrupting social relationships. (Pro-social behaviours, in contrast, maintain or extend interactions and strengthen relationships.)

In elementary school classrooms and on school playgrounds, the most common forms of antisocial behaviour are

- disruptive, noncompliant behaviour,
- physically aggressive behaviour (including bullying), and
- verbal or social aggression (for example, insults, exclusion, negative gossip, and ridicule).

In contrast, as children move into high school, the following trends occur:

- Openly defiant or disruptive behaviour declines.
- Physical aggression declines among most adolescents and in most neighbourhoods. However, a small group of highly aggressive youth, usually boys, begin to use weapons, engage in group conflicts, and assault teachers and strangers as well as peers (Loeber & Hay, 1997).
- Social aggression increases and is extended to new domains, such as dating aggression and sexual harassment. Exclusion and negative gossip are now amplified by the use of social media on the internet (Prevnet, 2014).

We will now explore these changes in more detail.

I. DISRUPTIVE, NONCOMPLIANT BEHAVIOUR

It is useful to consider cooperative and noncompliant behaviour together, as they constitute the extremes of a single dimension. Both grow out of early relationships in the family and are then carried into the wider social contexts of the school.

Beginning in infancy and toddlerhood, parents who are affectionate and responsive to their children's behavioural initiations and emotional distress have children who become securely attached and reasonably compliant (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005). Secure attachments (present for about 60 percent of parent–child dyads) are relationships that are marked by mutual positive affect, mutual responsiveness, and mutual cooperativeness (Bowlby, 1982). Because the parent is responsive to the child's feelings, desires, and agency (that is, because the parent is willing to negotiate and accommodate), the child experiences adult requests for compliance as reasonable and fair, rather than coercive, and comes to respect and internalize them (Piaget, 1932/1997). This outcome is sometimes called receptive compliance (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2008). This is the pathway that, with continued parental warmth and responsiveness, leads to later self-regulation and cooperative social relationships with classmates and teachers in elementary school and, ultimately, high school (Sroufe et al., 2005)

Various problematic patterns of early parenting lead to later noncompliance and difficulties with self-regulation. Early care that is inconsistent (nonresponsive at some times but
intrusive at other times) leads to resistant attachments (present in about 10 percent of parent–child dyads). As toddlers, these children are both clingy and resentful. In preschool and early elementary school they are dependent, seeking excessive contact with teachers, and they have difficulty adjusting to novelty or change (Sroufe et al., 2005). The fluid, rapidly changing circumstances present in peer interactions are also challenging for them. As children, and even as adolescents, they show a tendency to focus on one or two friends, and to be preoccupied with these relationships.

Early parenting that is cool, physically rejecting, and unresponsive to children’s emotional distress results in avoidant attachments (present in about 15 percent of parent–child dyads). As a result of this history, these children avoid their parents when they are emotionally distressed, and often ignore them at other times. If these relationship characteristics persist, then by preschool, these children are liable to attack other children who are upset, and they are difficult and noncompliant with teachers (Sroufe et al., 2005). Like children with resistant attachment histories, those with avoidant attachment histories are more likely to display situational compliance. In contrast to receptive compliance, situational compliance depends on coercion and external controls, and is linked to later deception and evasion, rather than internalization and cooperation (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2008). Sustained by parental negativity and family interactions characterized by mutual coercion and low levels of positive affect and affection, patterns of conflict and noncompliance carry into elementary school and then into high school, where they are re-created and consolidated in new relationships and contexts (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2008).

The implications for classroom management are fairly straightforward. Teachers who are friendly and fair can more successfully be firm. Although warmth is thought to be especially important for teachers in the primary grades (Calder Stegemann & Roberts, 2013), the importance of being friendly and fair holds for high school teachers as well. Noncompliance and defiance usually indicate that children are experiencing serious relationship problems. If these problems are in the family, they can be difficult for teachers to address. However, as children grow older, teachers can help them understand that school (in contrast to home) is a benign environment and that it is in their interest to cooperate, and so create a relatively pleasant experience for themselves.

The need for intervention is underscored by longitudinal evidence that noncompliance and behavior problems in elementary and high school are part of a long developmental process that leads to dropping out in high school. For example, Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, and Carlson (2000) reported that students who dropped out of high school, compared to those who graduated, experienced less responsive caregiving when they were toddlers. Less responsive caregiving, as outlined above, contributes to behavior problems in elementary school, which in turn predict dropping out before the end of high school. Taken together, these variables correctly classified 75 percent of the students in their sample as dropouts or graduates. Measures of academic achievement and IQ did not provide any additional information on who would or would not drop out. Dropouts do struggle academically; but this appears largely to be a consequence of the social processes that lead them to withdraw from school.

II. PHYSICAL AGGRESSION

Differences between reactive and instrumental aggression, which first emerge in kindergarten and Grade 1, are thought to be important. Reactive aggression, which is usually a response to being attacked, is characterized by intense emotional distress, including anger. In contrast, instrumental aggression (or proactive aggression, as it is sometimes called) is undertaken in order to achieve some goal and is relatively “cold-blooded.” Children characterized by reactive aggression are more inattentive and anxious, whereas instrumental aggression is associated with later delinquency (Dodge, Coie, & Lynam, 2006).

Gender differences in physical aggression are first apparent in preschool and increase as children become older, chiefly because girls become less physically aggressive over time.
However, girls do not forego physical aggression entirely. Both girls and boys report high levels of physical aggression with their siblings (Loeber & Hay, 1997); and adolescent girls in the Ontario Child Health Study reported surprisingly high levels of physical aggression, given their age. For example, 7 percent of adolescent girls reported physically assaulting other people, compared to 12 percent of adolescent boys (Pepler & Craig, 2005). Moreover, highly aggressive girls are just as aggressive as highly aggressive boys (in terms of frequency), and they share the same constellation of associated problems noted below for boys (Pepler & Sedighdeilami, 1998; Pepler & Craig, 2005). Thus, even though girls in general are less physically aggressive than boys in general, physical aggression can be a problem for some girls even into early and middle adolescence.

Although physical aggression declines for most children, for a few, mostly boys, aggression and bullying consolidate and become more frequent and more intense over the primary and intermediate grades (Loeber & Hay, 1997). Because they are frequently abrasive in their social interactions, these children tend to be rejected by nonaggressive, prosocial children, and so begin to associate with other aggressive, abrasive children as early as the primary grades. These deviant peer groups are thought to play an important role in consolidating and extending the aggressive behaviour of the children who comprise them.

By the intermediate grades, cruelty to other children or to animals emerges; and by adolescence, aggressive behaviours can result in injury or even death, not only because adolescents are stronger, but because they begin to use weapons (Loeber & Hay, 1997). These trends are of long standing. For example, in the United States, it was reported as early as 1993 that the proportion of students carrying weapons doubled from Grade 6 to Grade 9, from about one quarter of students to nearly half (Loeber & Hay, 1997). Cairns and Cairns (1994) reported that over 80 percent of the boys in their sample had access to firearms, and half of those under the age of 16 reported owning a gun of their own.

Thanks to gun control legislation, this problem is not as acute in Canada. The homicide rate for children under the age of 15, approximately four per million in Canada in the 1990s, is roughly 14 times lower than the rate in the United States (Canadian Paediatric Society, 2005). Although remaining small in absolute terms, the Canadian homicide rate does increase dramatically with age. For example, in 2009, homicides from all causes increased from 4 per million for children aged 10 to 14 to 29 per million for children aged 15 to 19 (Statistics Canada, 2012). Approximately 80 percent of these deaths (53 of 66, across all Canada) involved boys.

Despite restricted access in Canada, weapons are a concern, because although aggressive children typically fight with children of the same gender during elementary school, during adolescence, as we noted earlier, highly aggressive boys begin to rape strangers and assault teachers. Organized gangs also emerge at this time, and group fights lead to more, and more serious, injuries (Loeber & Hay, 1997). Fortunately (for teachers), serious violence is relatively rare at school—the majority of child and adolescent homicide victims are killed by family members (Canadian Paediatric Society, 2005).

For most children, in contrast to highly aggressive children, physical aggression declines over the course of elementary school and reaches fairly low levels by the end of high school (Prevnet, 2014). However, over this time, the nature of aggression changes. During preschool, children are chiefly aggressive for instrumental purposes—that is, to achieve desired objects or goals. But over the course of elementary school, aggression becomes increasingly hostile—that is, directed towards particular persons—and is more often elicited by perceived threats and insults, trends that increase during adolescence (Dodge et al., 2006).

The chief difference between school-age children identified as aggressive and those identified as nonaggressive by teachers (and classmates) appears to turn on self-regulation. In observational studies, both groups are aggressive on school playgrounds (e.g., Pepler, Craig, & Roberts, 1995); but children identified as aggressive are also aggressive in the classroom,
whereas nonaggressive children are not. Thus, by late elementary school (and even more during high school), nonaggressive children are able to regulate their behaviour according to context. For this group, noncompliance also declines over the primary grades, further evidence of the growth of self-management skills. In contrast, disruptive, noncompliant behaviour remains a characteristic of highly aggressive children (Loeber & Hay, 1997).

III. SOCIAL AND VERBAL AGGRESSION  Verbal aggression, like physical aggression, involves face-to-face confrontation, but the assault is verbal, comprised of threats, ridicule, and insults. In contrast, social aggression (also called indirect aggression or relational aggression) is covert. Characterized by exclusion, ostracism, collusion, negative gossip, and character defamation, it can be difficult to identify those who perpetrate it. This obscurity prevents both retaliation by the victim and regulation by adults (Pepler & Craig, 2005).

While there are no gender differences in verbal aggression, some studies report that girls engage in more social aggression than boys, beginning in early adolescence (Dodge et al., 2006). Xie, Cairns, and Cairns (2005) suggest several reasons why this should be so. Following puberty, girls are, in general, less strong than boys, making physical aggression less attractive to them. In addition, girls tend to be more concerned with relationships and social status, giving them both a motivation and a method: social aggression requires social networks. Girls also, more than boys, focus on intimacy and self-disclosure in their friendships, thus giving them more opportunities to betray trust. Finally, Xie and colleagues argue, girls perceive social aggression to be as hurtful as physical aggression, whereas boys perceive it to be less so.3 These factors, combined with its covert nature, make social aggression very attractive for some girls.

Developmental changes in verbal and social aggression are less documented than changes in physical aggression. It is thought that the increased use of verbal and social aggression after age four is partly responsible for the normative declines in physical aggression noted above for both girls and boys (Dodge et al., 2006). Exclusion and negative gossip can be observed as early as preschool in some children, and these behaviours increase as children gain in social skills and understanding over the primary and intermediate grades. But the largest increase in social aggression occurs in early adolescence, since the effective deployment of the weapons of social aggression (deception, betrayal, exclusion, and defamation) in a complex web of social relationships requires a high degree of cognitive ability, and this only comes with maturity and the onset of formal operations (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969).

B. DIFFICULTIES WITH SELF-REGULATION

Problems with self-regulation are not restricted to aggressive children or to social interactions. Problems with self-regulation are evident when students are distractible or impulsive when learning requires them to be focused and on-task. At the other extreme, chronic inhibition or over-control is also a self-regulation problem (Block & Block, 1980). Thus, good self-regulation is, above all, indicated by flexibility in responding to the needs of the current situation under changing conditions. Students with good self-management skills can be focused in the classroom and also spontaneous with their classmates in social situations.

In infancy and toddlerhood, self-regulation occurs in relationships. It is not yet an individual characteristic, because infants and toddlers need help from a caregiver in order to regulate their emotional distress and their impulses (e.g., Kopp, 1982, 1989). But by age three or four, with continued caregiver support and monitoring, self-regulation is becoming internalized; that is, children demonstrate an increasing ability to manage their emotions and impulses on their own (Stroufe, 1995). Self-regulation continues to improve with age,

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3Some authors (e.g., Underwood, 2003) have argued that of the two forms, social aggression is in fact more hurtful and damaging than physical aggression, since it undermines friendships and relationships with peers, and the damage it causes can only be undone with difficulty, if at all.