

Grade 8 Lesson

Guys' Issues

HEALTH AND LIFE SKILLS OUTCOMES

W-8.1 examine the relationship between choices and resulting consequences; e.g., how choosing to smoke affects how one looks, feels and performs

W-8.6 analyze possible negative consequences of substance use and abuse; e.g., fetal alcohol syndrome, drinking and driving

W-8.11 identify and develop personal resiliency skills; e.g., planning skills, social competence

R-8.8 describe and explain the positive and negative aspects of conformity and dissent as they relate to individuals in a group or on a team

CONTENT AND TIME (45-MINUTE LESSON)

1. Introduction to guys' issues (5 minutes)
2. Expectations of guys (10 minutes)
3. Expectations about alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and gambling (25 minutes)
4. Closure: Hand hockey (5 minutes)

REQUIRED MATERIALS

long piece of rope or thick string (about 15–20 m)

four laminated puzzle handouts: Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs and Gambling

coloured markers (two to three markers in each of four colours)

scissors

tape

soft puck or ball

1. Introduction to guys' issues (5 minutes)

Explain that this lesson is called Guys' Issues and is for guys only. It is an opportunity for Grade 8 boys to consider what issues they face as guys and how these issues relate to their views and decisions about alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and gambling.

Ask students their thoughts about the title, what it means to them, and how guys' issues relate to decisions about alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and gambling. Responses will give you a sense of where the class wants to go with the lesson. It's important to listen to ideas, without commenting, to avoid influencing the discussion. After the discussion, however, you can summarize some of the different views expressed and acknowledge the diversity of responses.

2. Expectations of guys (10 minutes)

Move the desks to the side of the classroom, leaving a large open area. Ask everyone to find a spot on the floor to sit.

Ask the class to think about the common rules or expectations that boys, teenage boys and men are exposed to in the community (e.g., you can't complain if you get hurt in sports, you should have a messy locker, etc.). Explain that each student will take a turn to say one of these rules or expectations out loud. After the first student expresses an idea, you will throw a rope to him. After the second student expresses an idea, the first student will hang on to the rope with one hand and throw the rest of the rope to the second student. This will continue until everyone has had a turn. Tell the class that their ideas do not have to be rules that they follow, but ones they sometimes feel pressure to follow. Students can also say a rule that is opposite of someone else's because it might depend on the family they live in, the people they hang around with, etc.

Ask everyone to have a look around and talk about what telling these rules did to the rope (e.g., got all mixed up, knotted, in a bind, etc.). Ask if they had realized that there were this many varying expectations about being a guy. Ask if they feel constricted

at times—like they are right now—when they try to live up to the spoken or unspoken expectations of being a guy.

3. Expectations about alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and gambling (25 minutes)

This activity makes a connection between expectations of boys and boys' views about alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and gambling. Divide the class into four groups: an alcohol group, tobacco group, other drugs group and gambling group. Distribute one puzzle handout to each group, and give each group a different colour of marker. They are to write down a sentence or two on each puzzle piece that describes a belief or expectation about using a substance (e.g., alcohol) or engaging in a behaviour (e.g., gambling). Ask for a couple of examples and remind them that there are different expectations for guys at different ages. Try not to give them suggestions, unless they are struggling, so that you do not bias their ideas. Here are some examples they might come up with:

- An eight-year-old does not smoke.
- Junior high guys on the track team don't smoke.
- A dad shouldn't smoke around his kids.
- It's okay to buy lotto tickets if you're 18.
- It's okay to bet with your friends for money.
- It's not okay to lose everything you own on gambling.

When all the puzzle pieces have statements on them, have the boys cut out their puzzle pieces (carefully, so that they can be put together with all other pieces). The groups have 10 minutes to write their statements and cut out the puzzle pieces.

Next, have everyone move to the open area in the centre of the room, combine all puzzle pieces and put them together as one large puzzle. When the puzzle is all laid out on the floor, have the students tape it together and tape it to the wall. Encourage everyone to enjoy the fun of working together to make the puzzle and chat informally about some of the expectations recorded.

Ask the members of each group to give more detail about two expectations they recorded on their puzzle pieces. After each group presents, have the rest of the class discuss how these particular expectations can affect their lives or the lives of other guys (family, friends, etc.). Wrap up the activity by reminding students that they will hear many expectations—both healthy and unhealthy—about alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and gambling. Express your confidence in them to make healthy choices. Explain that we are going to end with a hand hockey activity that looks at some healthy choices they can make.

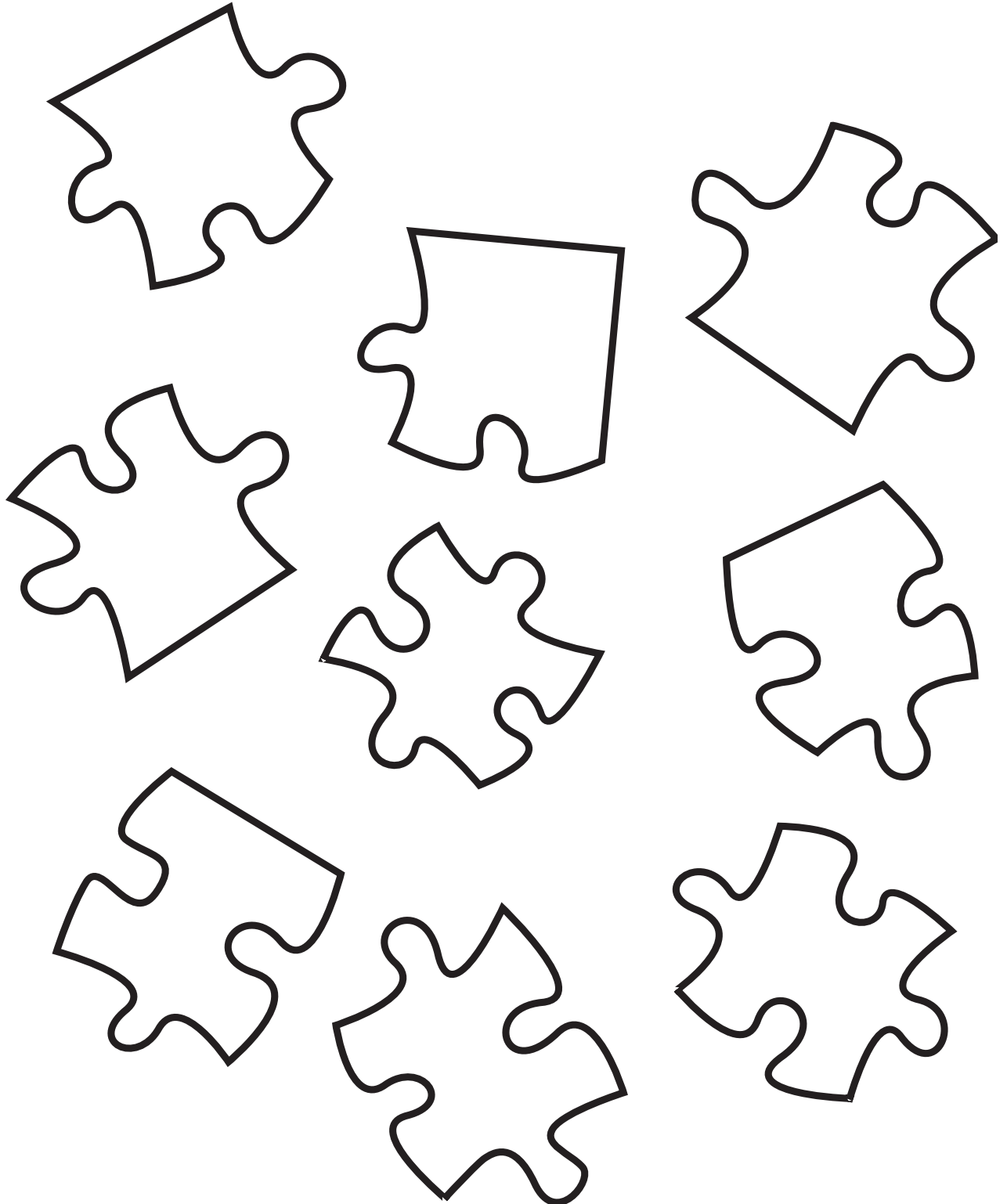
Closure: Hand hockey (5 minutes)

Have students find a space in the open area in the centre of the room. Whoever has the puck or ball blurts out something healthy they can do in their lives (related to dealing with expectations or choices about alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and gambling). They quickly slide the puck or throw the ball to another classmate who takes a turn, and so on.

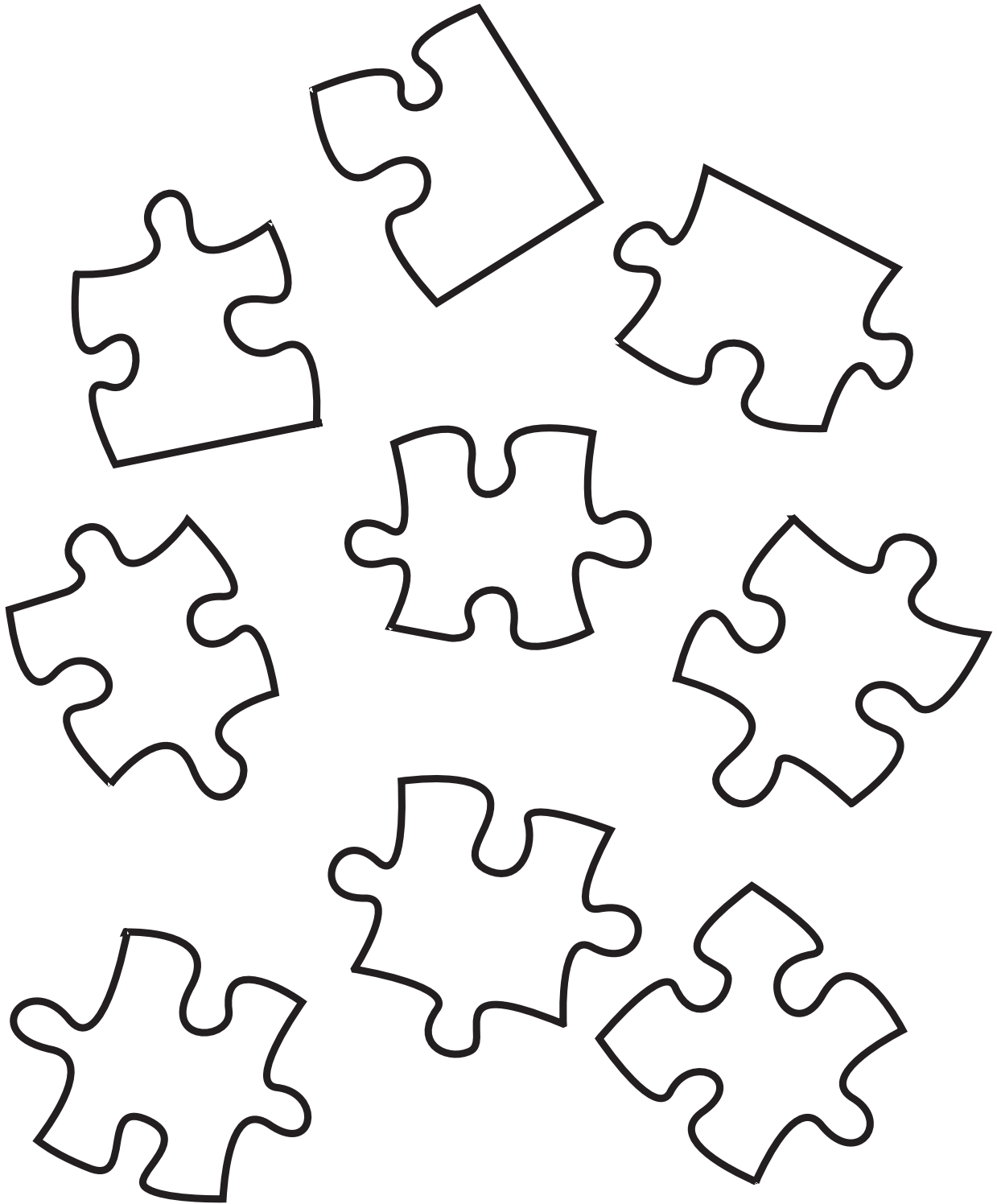
Some examples of statements they might make:

- Ask your parents not to smoke around you.
- Don't do anything that makes you uncomfortable.
- Organize a ball game or street hockey game.

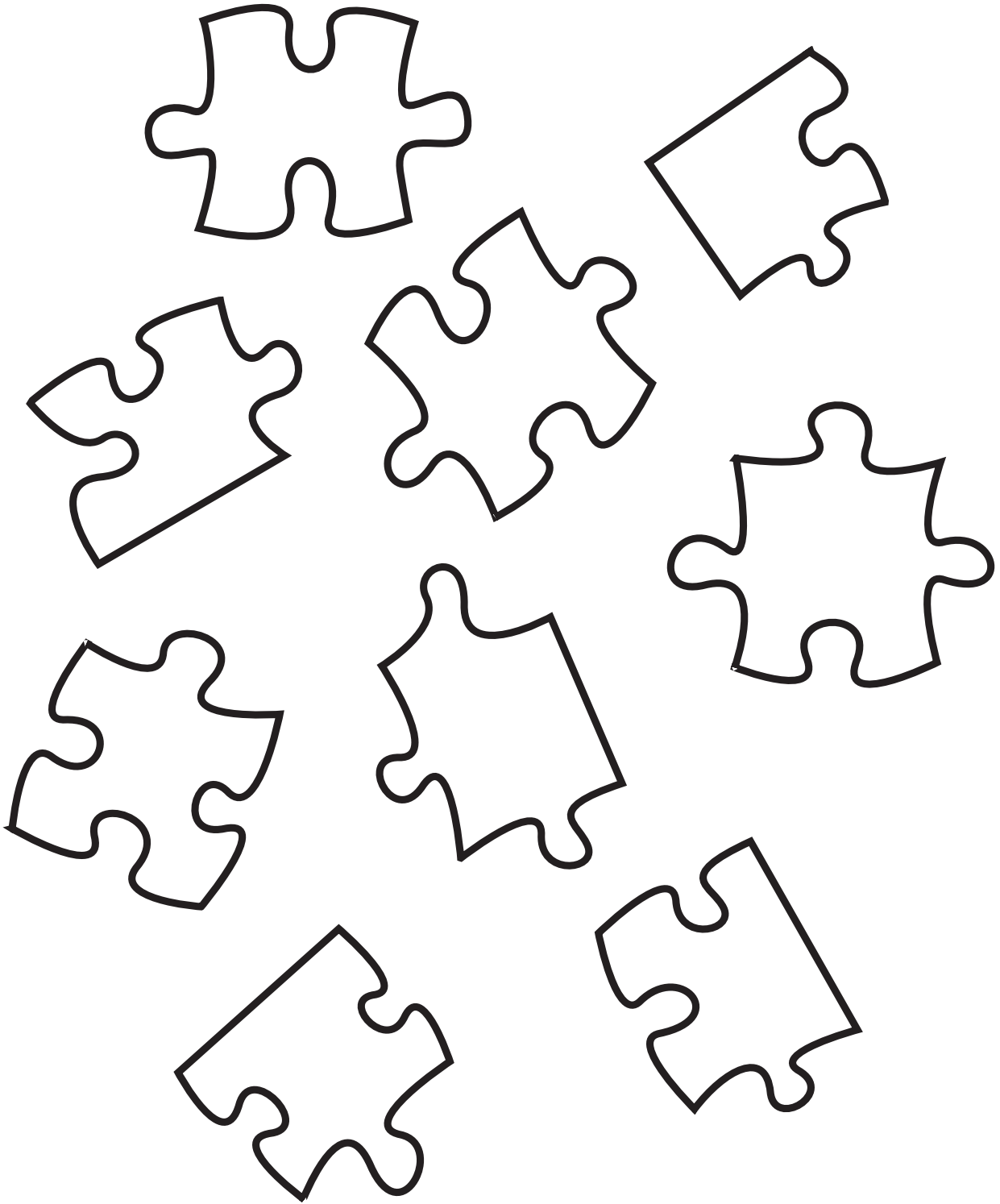
Alcohol



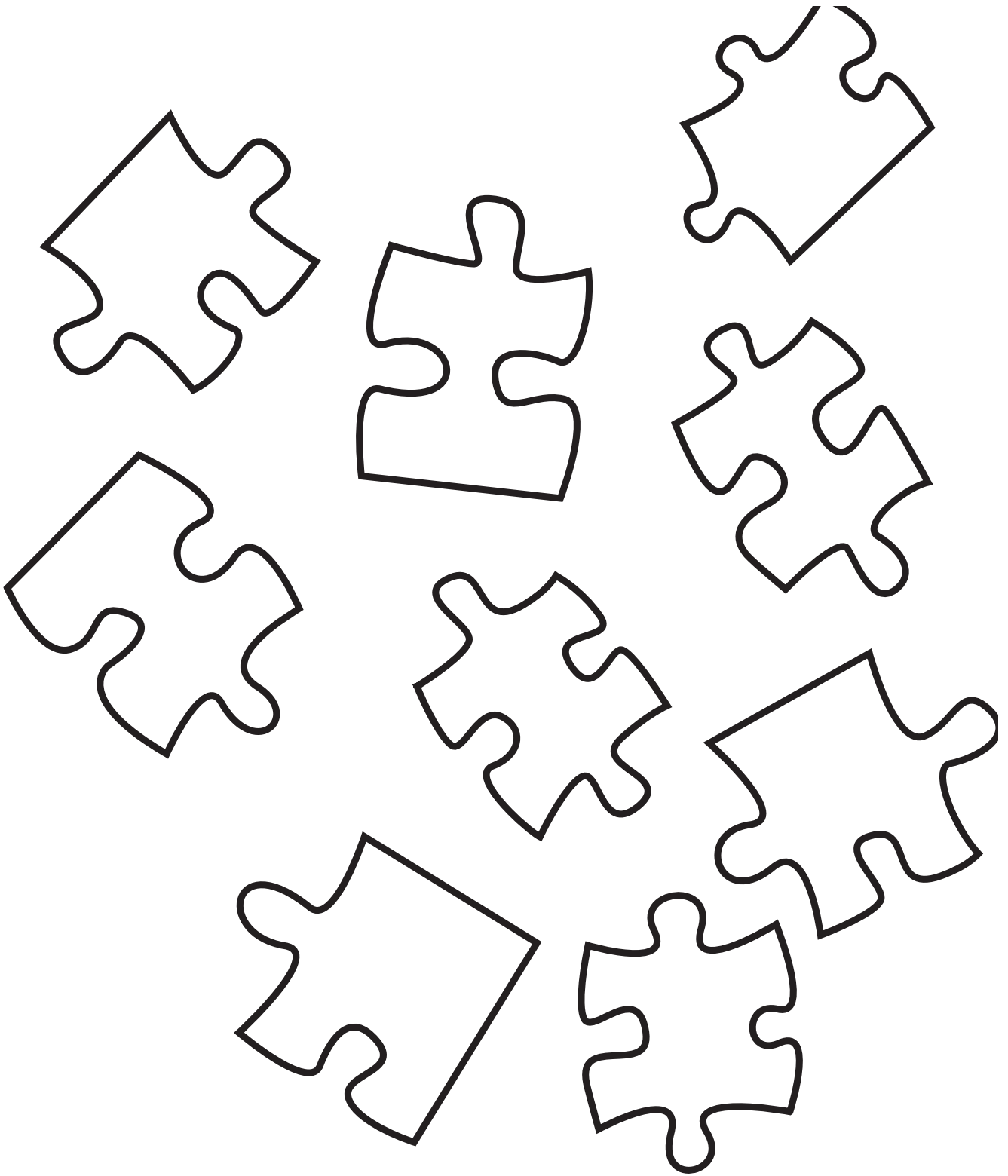
Tobacco



Other Drugs



Gambling



Appendix

Why a lesson on guys' issues?

Boys and girls have many similar needs for health information and healthy activities. They need to understand how their bodies grow and develop. They need to understand how to make healthy decisions on a whole range of topics and the potential trade-offs that come with different choices. However, there is a need for balance—times for adolescent boys and girls to work together, and other times to meet and have experiences as a group of guys only, or a group of girls. This lesson provides an opportunity for the boys in your class to work separately. The lesson on girls' issues provides the same opportunity for the girls.

Adolescent boys—like adolescent girls—are a diverse group. The World Health Organization's Department of Child and Adolescent Health (cited in Mikulencak, 2000) states that while some adolescent boys experience few challenges in health and development, others have considerable needs and face greater risks, and that most communities have “a prevailing model of masculinity against which males compare themselves, and alternative versions of masculinity” (p. 8). For example, in the Canadian DVD parenting series called *You, Me and the Kids*, Safeteens program instructor Dave Hatfield speaks of a “guy code of conduct”:

- Never show fear.
- Never ask for help; solve things on your own.
- You should always know what to do.
- You should never ever cry.
- Do not show physical pain.
- Do not show emotional pain.

There are many other generalizations of males. Six common male patterns suggested by the World Health Organization's Department of Child and Adolescent Health (cited in Mikulencak, 2000, p. 20) are

1. restricting emotions
2. showing control, power and competition in social situations
3. being homophobic
4. restricting sexual and emotional behaviour
5. obsessing with achievement and success
6. being less likely to seek health services when they have health problems

You may see some of these views expressed by the boys in your class, or you may work with boys who do not express these patterns of masculinity at all. Although this lesson will take a look at your students' sense of being guys and how this relates to their alcohol, tobacco, other drug and gambling choices, it is important not to highlight a certain view of a "typical male."

"Programmes that imply that boys need to conform to a certain social mould or to be controlled or coerced are not well accepted. Greater success is achieved with programmes that reach boys in more open and less threatening ways, reducing the potential reinforcement of negative images of boys and young men" (World Health Organization, 2000a, p. 5).

Having only Grade 8 boys present allows you to tailor the content of the lesson to topics that may be important to them, and to use a delivery style that they may prefer. For example, the boys in your class might like a more active delivery style that involves sports, games, spatial relations and project-oriented activities, rather than talking-oriented activities. The involvement of electronics and music could be appreciated as well (Friedman, 1999).

Does a guys' lesson need to be delivered by a male teacher?

When staff across the world who work with adolescent boys were asked whether the gender of the leader mattered for their programs, they said that “while it was important for adolescent boys to find positive male roles via staff, ability and personal characteristics were more important than the gender of the staff” (World Health Organization, 2000b, p. 8).

Many people found it important to have both genders in leadership. You need to decide who will lead this lesson at your own school, taking into account availability, talents and the needs of the particular group of students.

References

Friedman, S. (1999). *Just for girls*. Vancouver, BC: SALAL Books.

Mikulencak, M. (Ed.). (2000). *What about boys? A literature review on the health and development of adolescent boys*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization.

World Health Organization (2000a). *Boys in the picture*. Retrieved April 12, 2007, from http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2000/WHO_FCH_CAH_00.8.pdf

World Health Organization (2000b). *Working with adolescent boys*. Retrieved April 12, 2007, from http://www.who.int/child-adolescent-health/New_Publications/ADH/WHO_FCH_CAH_00.10.htm