

frequency of laboratory screening for STIs and HIV depends on sexual practices and STI history of individual adolescents.

All adolescents should receive medically accurate health guidance regarding responsible sexual behaviors, including abstinence. Counsel sexually active adolescents about ways to reduce their risk of STIs and unwanted pregnancy and provide positive reinforcement for responsible sexual behaviors. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents need the same sexuality education and information as heterosexual adolescents. All adolescents should be counseled on ways to reduce their risk of sexual exploitation.

## **Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Adolescents**

The population of gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents has unique developmental issues and health challenges. Although adolescents may participate in same-gender sexual activity or have same-gender attractions, they do not necessarily become gay, lesbian, or bisexual adults. Assigning sexual orientation labels to adolescents is complex and should be approached cautiously.

Most of the health challenges of sexual minority teens are responses to negative societal attitudes and messages about homosexual or bisexual orientation. They may use alcohol and other substances to escape their anxieties, and they are at much greater risk for suicidal behaviors than their heterosexual peers. Although nurses should screen all youth about suicidal thoughts and history of suicide attempts, it is especially critical for an adolescent who identifies as gay, lesbian, or bisexual or one who is questioning his or her orientation.

Publicly disclosing a gay, lesbian, or bisexual orientation during adolescence (“coming out”) brings additional challenges. Many adolescents disclose their orientation to a close peer, then a sibling, and finally a parent ([Steever, Francis, Gordon, et al, 2014](#)). Adolescents face hostility, violence, and even rejection from their families. Nurses should not encourage teens to disclose their sexual orientation to their families without first forming a safety plan in case the reaction is not supportive. For the majority of young people, referral to an agency providing support services or social opportunities for gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents is appropriate. Parents who seek assistance in adjusting to their son's