

Watch out for tell-tale signs of aggression

By PRISCILLA GOY

YOUTH counsellors and social workers say there are early warning signs that parents can look out for, so they can get help before their teens end up becoming aggressive and hurting themselves or others.

These signs often surface at home, and range from wanting to be alone all the time to taking their frustrations out on the furniture.

"It may be common for children to talk back to their parents," said Dr Carol Balhetchet, senior director for youth services at Singapore Children's Society. This is normal.

"But if, while arguing, the young person slams the door or throws furniture around, or he later goes on to punch his siblings or pick on the pets at home - that is abnormal."

Mr Dominic Lim, who runs Splat!, a non-profit volunteer group for youth at risk, added that those who later display aggressive behaviour are usually quite "closed-up".

"They may intentionally close their room door, or some may not want to leave their mobile phones charging in a common space in the house, and they are unusually cautious about letting others see their phone," he said.

"They may also prefer not to talk about school. Sure, typical teens may not want to tell their parents about their boyfriend or girlfriend, but if they are unwilling to have simple conversations such as about teachers or homework, that's a warning sign."

Experts encouraged parents to seek help early.

Mr Lim noted that people were often too embarrassed to get help from family service centres (FSCs) due to the stigma attached.

Dr Balhetchet explained: "There is usually a root cause for the aggressive behaviour and FSCs can help to identify that."

"Seeking help does not mean that the child has a mental problem."

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