When an Adult You Care About Misuses Substances: 10 Tips for Teens

1. **EDUCATE YOURSELF**
   It can be helpful to educate yourself about why people use alcohol and other drugs, how addiction happens, and why people make the choices they do. Learn about signs and symptoms, tolerance, cravings and withdrawal.

2. **HAVE A PLAN**
   Unpredictable things can happen when an adult in your life abuses substances. It's a good idea to have a plan in case there is ever a time when you are feeling unsafe (even if you never have to use it). Think of safe people & places, and make an emergency contact list. Decide what will you do if you ever feel at risk.

3. **SEEK OUT SUPPORT**
   Tell someone what is happening & how you feel. Speak to a trusted adult (e.g., grandparent, teacher, coach, counsellor or family doctor) or find a support group. Sometimes youth feel pressured to keep the substance-abusing adult's 'secret.' However, to support your own mental health, it is important to seek out support when you need it.

4. **NOTICE & NAME YOUR FEELINGS**
   When a significant adult in your life abuses substances, it can bring up many different feelings. You might feel scared, angry, confused, disappointed, sad or uncertain. Notice & name your feelings. Know that all feelings are okay. After naming your feelings, try to express them. Write in a journal, draw, paint, sing, or talk to a trusted support person.

5. **ACCEPT WHAT YOU CAN & CANNOT CONTROL**
   You can only control your own thoughts, feelings & behaviours. You cannot control the choices of others, and trying to do so creates a lot of disappointment. Try to be realistic and accept what you can & cannot control. Remember, your job is to take care of YOU. It's not your job to take care of the adults in your life.

6. **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF**
   It is important to take care of yourself so you are in a good position to cope. Luckily, what is good for your body is also good for your brain. Try the Big 5 For Mental Health: regular physical activity, healthy eating, getting enough sleep, maintaining supportive connections with others & helping out. It's also wise to drink water, limit caffeine & avoid alcohol or drugs.

7. **GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK**
   We all need a break sometimes, especially when we are dealing with difficult situations. Give yourself a break when you need it. Explore and practice things that can quiet your mind. These may include:
   - taking slow, deep breaths
   - going for a walk
   - trying meditation
   - progressive muscle relaxation
   - having a warm cup of tea
   - practicing gratitude

8. **DO WHAT YOU LOVE**
   Even when times are hard, there are also good things in life. It's ok to take your mind off your problems and do what you love. Dance, write, draw, read, play with your pet, listen to music, watch a funny show, spend time with friends – whatever makes you smile and feel encouraged.

9. **APPRECIATE THE GOOD TIMES**
   Even if they abuse alcohol or drugs, the significant adult in your life has times when they are sober, feel better or are having a good day. When this happens, try to do something together. Appreciate the good times – even if they don’t happen as often as you’d like. Let your parent or caregiver know that you care about them & enjoy spending time with them.

10. **HOW DO I LEARN MORE?**
    There is much more you can learn about when an adult in your life abuses substances. Visit mentalhealthliteracy.org to get the info you need.