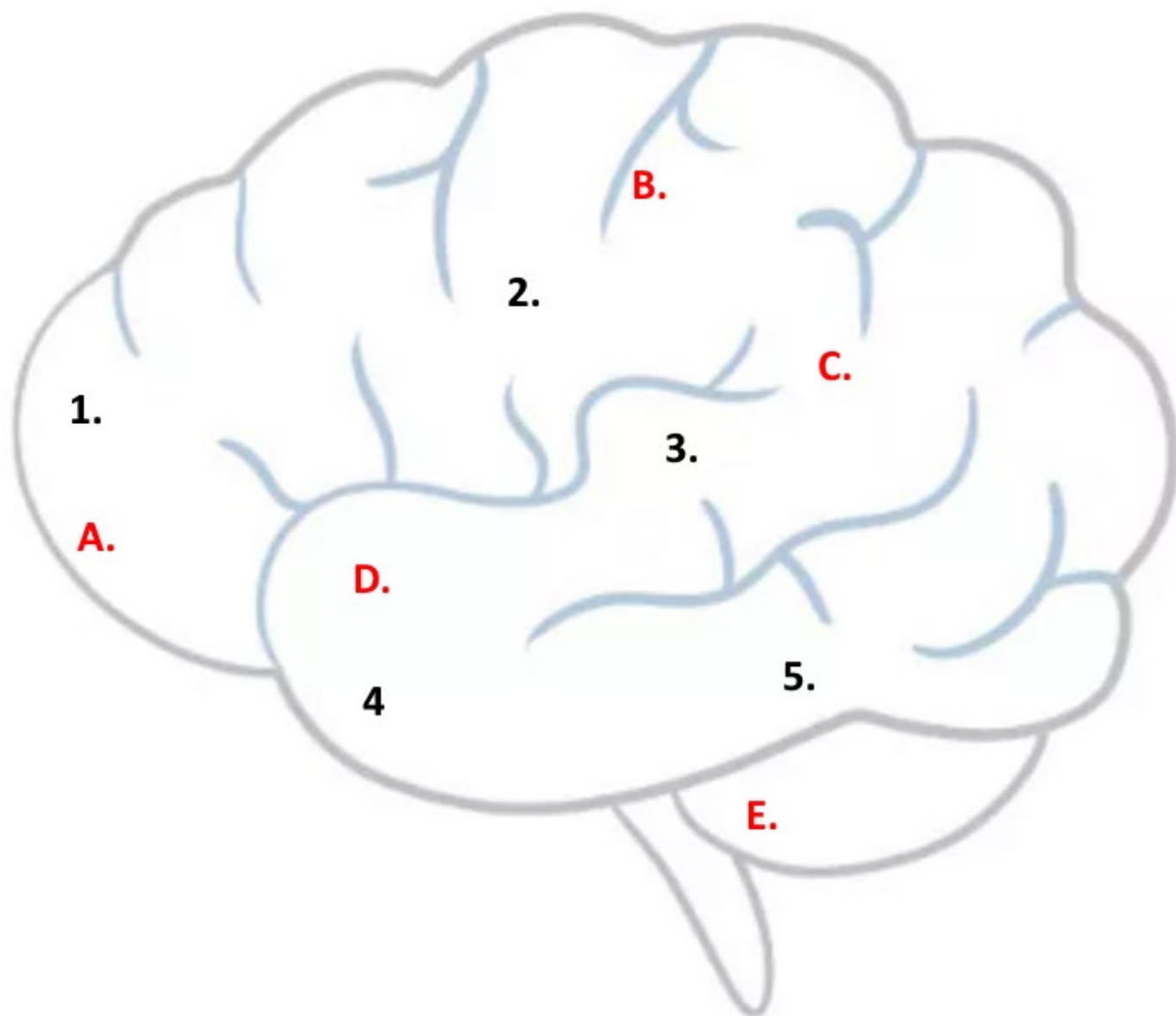




Brainspace

Opening exercise: Start by thinking for a few minutes about some of the things that occupy your mind nowadays. List as many as you can think of by putting them in the brain picture below. Try to put neutral, positive or helpful thoughts next to the **black numbers 1-5**. If you have negative or harmful thoughts that occupy your mind, then put those next to the **red letters A-E**



When everyone has had time to fill out the diagram, then as a group discuss some of the thoughts that occupy space in your mind in your life today.



Discussion: *Cleaning Out our Brainspace: Strategies for coping with negative thoughts*

Read First – Some people have a chronic mental health condition called Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). OCD involves recurring obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors that can be extremely difficult to control. OCD is biological in nature and often requires a psychiatric evaluation with a qualified professional who can prescribe medication as needed. The strategies discussed here may help someone with OCD but alone they may not be enough dependent upon the severity of OCD

The R's of Managing Difficult Thoughts

Keep in mind, different strategies listed below work better for various kinds of problems so it may require using a variety or even a combination of these coping skills to manage negative thoughts.

Resolve – Ask yourself: Can I lessen or remove these difficult thoughts if I take care of the source problem?

- Example: “My obsessive thoughts about money decreased significantly when I finally resolved the stress by making a budget and started sticking to it for a while”

Root Out – This is like the Resolve strategy just mentioned but this could involve deeper problems in life. Things like trauma, fears, and chronic anxieties can trigger negative thoughts so getting to the root of these issues (which can take time and therapy) can help a great deal.

- Example: “I was driving myself out of my mind thinking critically about my looks until I finally got help and processed my childhood experiences where my mother was always putting me down about how I looked while I was growing up. Now that I have worked on this, my mind is much freer and clearer”

Redirect and Replace – Some thoughts are simply better dealt with by distracting ourselves or changing the channel. This is not always easy but when it works it can be extremely effective

- Example – “Every time I started thinking about my Ex, I just remembered what a waste of time it is to think about the past and instead I focused on positive goals that I hoped to achieve in my new life since the relationship ended. Since I shifted focus my career has really advanced!”

Reason – Some thoughts are just irrational or unrealistic, and therefore they can be reduced or even removed by thinking things through in a reasonable and rational way. This can take practice.

- Example – “Sometimes I wake up in the morning and start obsessing about how things could go wrong in the day ahead. I have learned to reduce those thoughts by reasoning that the odds are my day will have some basic ups and downs but if I make safe decisions, I am going to be just fine, so worrying about what might happen each morning is a waste of time”

Recognize – Finally, sometimes we need to recognize and accept that some things are what they are and therefore, thinking about them is not going to change anything. It can be important to remind ourselves that thinking about the same thing over and over is not going to make it any better

- Example – I used to find myself obsessing about my receding hairline until finally I accepted that some men just go bald and as much as it can be uncomfortable to adapt to, it just is what it is. I then gave in and changed my hairstyle to adapt and I am so much more at peace mentally.

Pick a problem in your life from the opening exercise and discuss how you can practice these strategies to manage the negative thoughts