

# The Five Secrets of Effective Communication

*David D. Burns, MD, from his book, "Therapist's Toolkit"*

## LISTENING SKILLS

1. **The Disarming Technique:** Seek and find some truth in what the other person is saying, even if it seems totally unreasonable or unfair to you.
2. **Empathy:** Put yourself in the other person's shoes and try to see the world through his/her eyes.
  - a. **Feeling empathy** – Acknowledge how he/she is probably feeling. For example, (husband speaking), "So then the clerk told me to go to the end of the line and that was about all I could take." (wife speaking) "It sounds like that must have made you really angry."
  - b. **Thought empathy** – Paraphrase the other person's words. For example, (wife speaking), "I have fourteen things to do that all have to get done by noon today, so I would love to have some help with some of this!" (husband speaking) "You have a lot of things to do today, and you could use my help right now. Is that right?"
3. **Inquiry:** Ask gentle, probing questions to learn more about what the other person is thinking and feeling.

## SELF-EXPRESSION SKILLS

4. **"I Feel" Statements:** Use "I feel" statements, such as "I feel upset," rather than "you" statements, such as "You're wrong!", or "You're making me furious!"
5. **Stroking:** Find something genuinely positive to say to the other person, even in the heat of battle. Doing so conveys an attitude of respect, even though you may feel very angry with the other person at the moment.