The cartoon showed a maître d' greeting a family, the toddler pulling his mother's hair, and the preschooler tugging her hand. The caption read:

"Would you prefer the spanking or non-spanking section?"

When I first saw that cartoon, I despaired that we were destined for the spanking section with our ketchup-spilling, table-crawling, sugar packet-collecting brood of four. Through the years we did manage to civilize our kids and stay seated in the non-spanking section - but it didn't come naturally.

**Spanking Just Because**

We all want to help our children. We really do. The question is how to do it? In the book, *Anger*, Mitch Messer, Roman Coronado-Bogdaniak, and Linda Dillon write,

"We learn anger management in the same way we learn to wash dishes and make beds."

“…(We) adopt a mannerism that will last a lifetime. In other words, in the area of anger management, there hasn’t been a brain cell working for four generations.”

Replace *anger management* with the word *spanking* and the same statement fits. Little Bobby pulls his sister Susie's hair and Bobby's father Jim, gives Bobby the same swat Jim's mother gave him and her mother gave her. Jim forgets that he still tugs on his sister Margo's now gray-streaked hair, just as he used to yank her braids years ago whenever their mom would leave the room.

Perhaps it is time to get some new brain cells working.

**Not Harmful Doesn't Mean Desirable**

Recent research by the Institute of Human Development at the University of California, Berkeley, made headlines saying that *mild spanking* would not hurt a child's social or emotional growth. We could ask, "What is mild?" But the question itself identifies what most adults fear. Will an intended *mild swat* on the bottom turn into a *stinging* red welt, a bruised hip, or worse? What is too much?

Instead of trying to define *what is mild* or how much is too much, why not ask a different question? What does spanking accomplish? We know what we want it to do which is to change behavior. But, does it?
Interrupt or Change?

Do you ever feel like a rerun of your own movie? Yesterday you yelled at Marty for calling his brother a doo-doo head, spanked him, and sent him to his room. Today Marty is back in his room, same reason but a different spanking. What do you think the odds are that Marty's name-calling and your spanking will flash across the family action screen next week? Higher than you wish?

Why is misbehavior repeated? Spanking tends to be better at interrupting misbehavior than at changing it.

Years ago, whenever we opened our front door, our dog, Squeaker, would race outside to chase the neighbor's cat. One spring the neighbors and their cat moved. Months later, Squeaker was still tearing outside in eager pursuit of the former resident cat, and he kept at it even though he never saw that cat again.

Sometimes we keep doing the same thing over and over expecting the result to change. Has your cat moved? Do you keep spanking even though the name-calling (or some other misbehavior) continues?

The Hand and the Bag

Picture a paper bag; inside that sack repose all of the tools, tricks and teachings we bring to the job of parenting. Some bags are lightweight, some rattle a bit when shaken and a few seem to bulge with possibilities. But no matter how little or how much the bags contain, the same thing happens when they are empty.

We reach inside; our hand zigzags back and forth as our fingers fail to detect anything there; then with a final lunge we rip through the bottom. The hand that emerges is the hand that spanks.

Does your parenting tool bag leave you empty-handed? Spanking is, at best for parents, a last resort and at worst, the ONLY tool in the bag. Yet there are many, much more effective, tools for handling discipline. Remember, discipline is about guidance that teaches, not hurtful.

Doesn't Teach

Lilly's job involved doing home visits at a nearby military base. Each week she would spend an hour or two in a family's home. As women nursed their newborns, Lilly stirred pots of bubbling stew, served up juice and crackers to toddlers, or helped fold diapers still warm from the dryer.

In mid-October Lilly shared an overstuffed sofa with a mom whose sixteen-month-old daughter played nearby. As they chatted the child busied herself by pushing a chair across the floor to the TV console and scaling to the top of the set. When her mom saw what the child had done, she hurried across the room, yanked the would-be mountaineer off the TV, and swatted her bottom.
"No! No! Bad girl! You can't climb up there."

"Well, she had climbed up there, " thought Lilly, uncomfortable seeing the toddler spanked but not knowing what she could say or do without losing the mother's trust.

On Lilly's next visit, fallen leaves formed a colorful nest for the grinning jack-o-lantern stationed on the family's front steps. Lilly joined the mom in the living room as before and within ten minutes the toddler was again standing on top of the television set. This time Lilly hurried to lift the child down, holding out a book she had brought with her. The toddler forgot her climbing expedition and settled into Lilly's lap, pointing to the pictures as she helped turn the pages.

"Gee, I guess the spanking didn't teach her to stop climbing, did it?"

The mom sighed, nodding in agreement, "No, the spanking hasn't stopped her."

No, because spanking doesn't teach.

**To Do or Not To Do**

Why do we spank? It comes down to a simple equation: we either want children to do something or not to do something. "Pick up your toys." "Quit throwing the toys."

Have you ever noticed that the toys still keep appearing where you don't want them or some new variation appears? Does crayon-throwing end this afternoon but reappear at dinnertime as tossed noodles, at bedtime as a flying shoe, or at the park as an upended bucket of sand?

If we want the toys to get picked up day after day or the throwing to stop and not restart, then perhaps we need to switch tools.

**Past, Present and Future**

Does your past repeat itself? Do you do what your parents did without thinking about 'why' or even 'if it works or doesn't work?'

Is your present a series of reruns with both you and your child doing the same thing over and over again?

Is your parenting tool bag torn and ragged while leaving you empty-handed?

If your answers are yes, then perhaps it is time to retrain some brain cells, take a seat in the non-spanking section, and keep your hands to yourself. The fastest way to a future that promises improved behavior in your child could just be to change your own responses.

Click on Assignment 3b for an E.P.A. (Encouragement - Prevention -Action) plan that can deliver the results you most want: changes and improvement behaviors that last.