

For immediate release:

## **Experts Agree: Infants and Toddlers Need Overnight Care from Both Parents After their Separation**

DALLAS — Feb. 4, 2014 — When parents are married, they generally share the care of their babies —diapering, feeding, bathing, putting to bed, soothing in the middle of the night, cuddling in the morning. But if parents separate or divorce, should children under four spend every night in one home? Or will infants and toddlers benefit from spending overnight time in the care of each parent?

To answer these questions, Dr. Richard Warshak, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, spent two years reviewing and analyzing the relevant scientific literature. His conclusions garnered the endorsement of 110 of the world's top experts. "Just as we encourage shared parenting in two-parent homes," Warshak said, "the evidence shows that shared parenting should be the norm for children of all ages, including sharing the overnight care for very young children." To maximize children's chances of having long lasting relationships and secure attachments to each parent, Warshak's consensus report encourages both parents after their separation to maximize the time they spend with their children, including the sharing of overnight parenting time.

The consensus report is available Feb. 4 in the online advance edition of *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, [available online here](http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/law/20/1/46/) [http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/law/20/1/46/].

Warshak notes that shared parenting is not for all families. Regardless of their children's ages parents should always consider a range of factors when creating the best parenting plan. "What works for one child in one family, may not be best for another child in different circumstances," says Warshak. "Among other factors, the parents' work schedules and their capabilities to provide good care must be taken into account."

But Warshak, referencing accepted research of the past 45 years, objects to the idea that children under four, and some say under six, need to spend nearly all their time with only one parent and cannot handle being apart from that parent even if they receive loving and attentive care from the other parent. Prohibitions or warnings against infants and toddlers spending overnight time in their father's care are inconsistent with our current understanding of child development, says Warshak. Babies and toddlers need parents who respond consistently, affectionately, and sensitively to their needs. They do not need, and most do not have, one parent's full-time, round-the-clock presence. Many married mothers, such as flight attendants, doctors, and nurses, work night shifts that keep them away from their infants and toddlers at night. Like these married mothers, single mothers do not need to worry about leaving their children in the care of their fathers or grandparents during the day or overnight. Warshak and his colleagues believe that society should encourage fathers to engage in the daytime and overnight care of their infants and toddlers after separation.

When asked why he wrote this report, and published it with his colleagues' endorsements, Warshak said, "Judges and lawmakers hear competing versions of which parenting plans are best

for very young children. We want to clarify where science stands on these issues by presenting a consensus of opinion from prominent researchers and practitioners.”

For this consensus report, Warshak assembled an international group of top experts in early child development, parent-child relationships, and divorce. They reviewed his analyses, offered comments to improve the report, and endorsed its conclusions and recommendations. The experts are united in their concern that flawed science is leading to parenting plans and custody decisions that harm children and their parents. “This report should provide strong direction for policy guidelines and decision-making,” said Warshak.

The report, "Social Science and Parenting Plans for Young Children: A Consensus Report," will appear in print in the February 2014 issue of *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, a journal of the American Psychological Association.

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