

# The 2-4-2 Book Program:

## Promoting and Strengthening Parent-Child Relationships



**ZERO TO THREE**  
Early connections last a lifetime



The **2-4-2 Program** was created by the Honorable Constance Cohen, Retired, as a way to:

- *maintain a close relationship between very young children in out-of-home care and their parents between visits, and*
- *support the very young child's healthy development.*

The Honorable Constance Cohen (Ret.) recognized that a simple and effective way to support and strengthen the connection between an infant or toddler and their parent was through reading together over the phone or other social media platform. Maintaining a strong connection is critical for promoting reunification.

The program offers parents a way to feel close to and connected with their baby or toddler, even if they cannot be physically together. It is a simple but powerful strategy for building the safe, stable, and nurturing early relationships that infants and toddlers need to thrive.

## How it Works

Determine a convenient time of day the parent can routinely call the caregiver in order to **read the book to the child over the phone**. The caregiver will turn the pages while the parent reads the book over the speaker phone (or FaceTime etc.).

It is best to **call at the same time everyday** so the child can expect the call as part of the routine. This predictability is essential for a healthy attachment relationship between the very young child and parent.

**Encourage the parent and caregiver to go beyond the words in the book.** Suggest talking about colors, shapes, sizes, expressions on people's faces, and asking questions such as, "Where are Big Bird's feet?" For babies, the caregiver can point to the picture as the parent is describing or asking them to find it; toddlers can be asked to point to the picture themselves.

Encourage parents to **enhance the relationship-building opportunity** by giving the caregiver a shirt or blanket with his/her scent on it to hold or wrap around the child while reading. For older children, a special toy or other item that connects the child and parent may be used.

**Older children and parents can alternate reading pages** or paragraphs to each other.

Civic groups and other community organizations can **lead book drives or conduct fundraisers** to maintain a collection of books in the courtroom for the program. It works best to **ask the parent to choose the book** that they think their baby or toddler will like best.

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## SAMPLE SCRIPT FOR THE JUDGE TO USE IN INTRODUCING THE 2-4-2 BOOK PROGRAM

The program can be introduced to the parent by the Judge in a hearing or by the Community Coordinator in a Family Team Meeting. It is important that the Community Coordinator speak with the child's caregiver in advance of the hearing or meeting during which the 2-4-2 Book Program will be introduced to the parent, to be certain that the caregiver is willing to participate.

***Judge addressing the child's mother, Ms. Smith, and the child's caregiver, Mrs. Jones. The child's name is Leyla.***

Ms. Smith, I would like to talk with you about an important way to feel connected with Leyla—and for Leyla to feel connected to you—while she's staying with Mrs. Jones. Here's how it works:

In a few minutes, I'm going to ask you, Ms. Smith, to choose a couple of books that you like and think your child will enjoy. And then I'd like Mrs. Jones to take a copy of each of the same books.

***Addressing parent:***

Ms. Smith, I'm asking that you work together to find a time every day when you can read the book to Leyla over the phone. You can use the speaker phone, FaceTime, or any other way that you feel comfortable with connecting virtually to Leyla. Maybe you can do this first thing in the morning, or before naptime, or at bedtime. But the key is that this needs to happen at a predictable time so that Leyla can trust that you will be with her, in this way, every day—or as regularly as possible. Leyla will feel safe, loved, and know that she can count on you to be there for her. When young children can predict what will happen, it gives them confidence and helps them trust people in years to come.

***Addressing caregiver:***

Mrs. Jones, you can put Leyla on your lap and turn the pages while her mom reads the book aloud over the phone. A way of helping Leyla feel especially connected to her mom is by wrapping her in some clothing or a blanket [for babies] or letting her hold some clothing or a blanket [for toddlers] that has her mother's scent on it. Having that scent around her will help Leyla to feel physically connected to mom during this special, regular time together.

***Addressing parent:***

So, Ms. Smith, if you could provide Mrs. Jones with a blanket that you've slept with or an article of clothing, that would be really helpful.

***Addressing both parent and caregiver:***

By reading to Leyla in this way, it will help her feel connected to both of you, and keep the connection with you, Ms. Smith, strong! It's also important because reading to a baby and toddler helps them learn about their world, helps them to learn words, and helps them to be ready for school. When children are very little, they are especially able to learn words...so even though we may want to groan when we read the same book for the 99th time, this is helping Leyla's development in lots of important ways.

I'm looking forward to hearing about how this is working for you, and when you come back to the court for your next hearing, you are welcome to choose two new books to read to Leyla!

## THE IMPORTANCE OF READING TO INFANTS AND TODDLERS

Shared reading promotes the very young child's development in many important ways. You can reference some of these many ways when you present the 2-4-2 Book Program to parents and caregivers.

### Social and Emotional Development

Shared reading creates a nurturing, soothing environment that helps babies and toddlers feel a sense of safety, trust, and calm. Books are also powerful tools to help young children make sense of difficult feelings. The experience of being held and read to creates positive sensory and emotional associations with reading. And books are an important way to strengthen the young child's shared identity with their own culture and to learn about other cultures.

### Cognitive Development

Shared reading engages the very young child's interest in sounds and builds attention, listening, and memory skills. Books help babies and toddlers make meaning about the world around them. This is especially so when adults make connections between pictures and stories in books and people, places, objects, ideas, and feelings.

### Language and Speech Development

Reading books helps babies and toddlers string meaningful ideas together and grows their imagination. Shared reading helps babies and toddlers learn new words and understand the language they hear. Reading books over and over helps build children's vocabulary. Very young children are also learning about speech patterns when books are read aloud to them.

### Motor Development

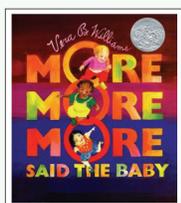
Turning pages in any form, tracing words and shapes/symbols, feeling textures, chewing, coordination, and focusing on pages and pictures supports development of fine and gross motor skills.

### Readiness for School

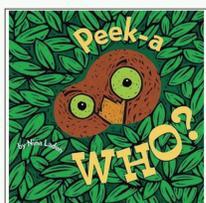
All of these developmental benefits add up! Research shows that reading to babies and toddlers makes an important difference in children being prepared for school.

### Suggested Developmentally Appropriate Books

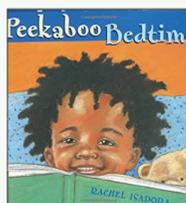
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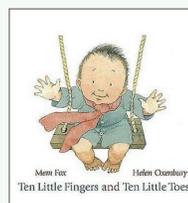
**More More More Said the Baby**  
by Vera B. Williams



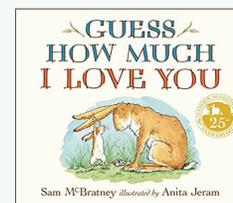
**Peek-a-WHO?**  
by Nina Laden



**Peekaboo Bedtime**  
by Rachel Isadora



**Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes**  
by Mem Fox and Helen Oxenbury



**Guess How Much I Love You**  
by Sam McBratney and Anita Jeram

## HELPFUL RESOURCES ABOUT SHARED READING

Five Fast Facts: Reading with Under-Threes

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3081-five-fast-facts-reading-with-under-threes>

Great Books to Read to Infants and Toddlers

<https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/great-books-read-infants-and-toddlers>

How to Introduce Toddlers and Babies to Books

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/304-how-to-introduce-toddlers-and-babies-to-books>

Seven Books About Feelings for Babies and Toddlers

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/7-books-about-feelings-for-babies-and-toddlers>

The “Missing” First Year: Parents Underestimate the Benefits of Reading and Talking with Babies

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/1506-the-missing-first-year-parents-underestimate-the-benefits-of-reading-and-talking-with-babies>

Tips for Reading to Infants and Toddlers

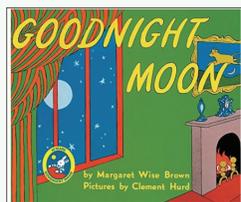
<https://www.readacrossamerica.org/tips-for-reading-to-infants-and-toddlers>

Who Am I? Sharing Picture Books that Nurture Positive Self-Identity

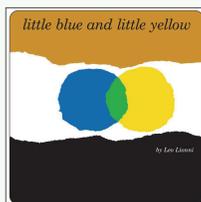
<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/2789-who-am-i-sharing-picture-books-that-nurture-positive-self-identity>

### Suggested Developmentally Appropriate Books

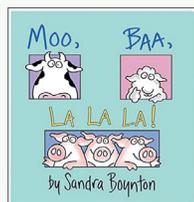
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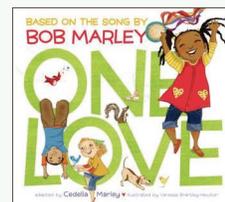
**Goodnight Moon**  
by Margaret Wise Brown



**Little Blue and Little Yellow**  
by Leo Lionni



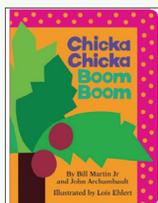
**Moo Baa La La La**  
by Sandra Boynton



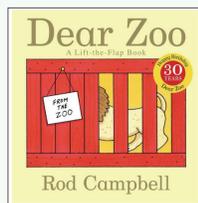
**One Love**  
by Cedelia Marley



**I Love You Through and Through**  
by Bernadette Rossetti-Shustak



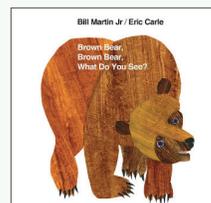
**Chicka Chicka Boom Boom**  
by Bill Martin, Jr.



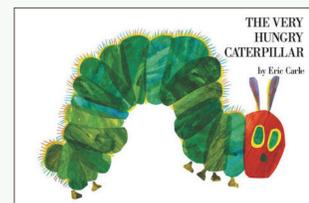
**Dear Zoo**  
by Rod Campbell



**Please Baby Please**  
by Spike Lee and  
Tonya Lewis Lee



**Brown Bear, Brown Bear  
What Do You See?**  
by Eric Carle



**The Very Hungry Caterpillar**  
by Eric Carle

### To learn more, please contact:

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