

# Character Builder 您好嗎？

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

## This week: Words about children

兒

Pronunciation: *er* (Putonghua, 2<sup>nd</sup> tone), *yi* (Cantonese 4<sup>th</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: so, child

兒 = son/child. 兒童 (*er tong*) = child/children: 兒歌 (*er ge* = children~songs), 兒童節目 (*er tong jie mu* = children~section~number = children's programmes). 兒戲 (*er xi* = child~play/game), however, describes rash/immature conduct.

兒童節 (*er tong jie* = children~festival) is Children's Day. 兒科醫生 (*er ke yi sheng* = child~subject~medicine~man = pediatricians) are examining 嬰幼兒 (*ying you er* = baby~young~children = infants) harmed by tainted milk. Eurasians are 混血兒 (*hun xue er* = mixed~blood~children). Hippies are 花朵兒童 (*hua duo er tong* = flower~blossom~children = Flower Children).

養兒防老 (*yang er fang lao* = raise~son~guarantee~old-age = children you raised will support you in your old age) is old wisdom, now unreliable.

by Diana Yue