

# 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

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

兒童 = 孩子 (*hai zi* = child~diminutive) = child/children. 童年 (*tong nian* = child~years) means childhood. Parents/nannies 帶孩子 (*dai hai zi* = take/hold~child = feed/hold/watch/parent kids), baby-sitters 看孩子 (*kan hai zi* = watch~kids). 童真 (*tong zhen* = child~pure/true) means child's innocence. 童心 (*tong xin* = child~heart) means mood for fun/play. 童話 (*tong hua* = child~talk/story) = fairytale.

童工 (*tong gong* = child~labour/work) are child-workers, 虐待兒童 (*nue dai er tong* = torture~treat~children) is child abuse. UNICEF promotes 兒童福利 (*er tong fu li* = children~fortune-benefit = children's welfare).

童子 (*tong zi* = child~diminutive) means (virgin) boy. Traditional medicine believes 童子尿 (*tong zi niao* = virgin-boy's~urine) has miraculous healing power.

by Diana Yue