

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.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4th tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest)

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about raising families

養

Putonghua pronunciation: *yang3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yeung5*

Meanings: give birth to, raise, foster, nurture, bring up, support

養 = 羊 (*yang2*, sheep/goat) + 食 (*shi2*, eat/feed). 養孩子 (*yang3 hai2 zi0* = breed-child-diminutive) = give birth to, raise children. 養家 (*yang3 jia1* = raise~family) means 養活 (*yang3 huo2* = support/rear~alive = sustain livelihood of) wife/kids. Farmers 飼養 (*si4 yang3* = feed~raise) livestock. Countries 養兵 (*yang3 bing1* = keep/train~soldiers/army).

Responsible adults 供養父母 (*gong1 yang3 fu4 mu3* = provide-for~support~father~mother), give kids 好教養 (*hao3 jiao4 yang3* = good-teach~raise = good breeding). 養父養母 (*yang3 fu4 yang3 mu3*) means foster parents.

Oldsters need 養老金 (*yang3 lao3 jin1* = support-old-gold = old-age pension). Divorcee pays 贍養費 (*shan4 yang3 fei4* = support~support~fee = alimony). Tired person 閉目養神 (*bi4 mu4 yang3 shen2* = closes~eyes~preserves~spirit/energy).

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