



Fun ways to learn Mandarin

“Children are born with the ability to learn languages as soon as they are born into this world. No matter what language you speak, your little one can pick it up in three simple steps,” says Patricia Koh, who pioneered the bilingual immersion early childhood education concept decades ago when she started Pat’s Schoolhouse in 1988.

Now the director and founder of MapleBear Singapore, Patricia shares that the three steps of learning a new language begin when kids hear the sounds, understand the meaning and speak the language.

To help your child master

her mother tongue, find everyday opportunities for her to listen to the language in natural settings by singing together, listening to a story, expressing needs and wants, playing outdoors, moving to music or going on an adventure.

You should also be a good role model. You can’t expect your kid to speak her mother tongue when you don’t use it at all, or have no desire to learn the language.

Communicate with your child in Mandarin at the most comfortable proficiency level for you, and remember that it is not necessary to shorten a sentence or repeat certain words.



EXPERT TIP
“To raise a bilingual child, parents must be able to embrace the two languages and use them to converse, not to test the child.”

– PATRICIA KOH,
 DIRECTOR
 AND FOUNDER
 OF MAPLEBEAR
 PRESCHOOL

MANDARIN ACTIVITY CHECKLIST

Give your child greater confidence and interest in picking up her mother tongue. Here’s an activity checklist you can do to make learning more fun.

- Infuse fun through a simple rhyme or an action song in Mandarin. Start the day with a simple “good morning” or “hello” song and end with bedtime song. You can easily find these on Youtube.
- Use the right words at the right time, because vocabulary is best understood when it is used in the right context. For example, while washing hands, you can say “Let’s wash our hands” or when you have a ball in your hand, say “Catch the ball”, in Mandarin.
- Play age-appropriate games that will excite your child in speaking Mandarin.
- Make eye contact with your little one as you speak, so she can see your lips moving and notice the sparkle in your eyes, inspiring joy in her as she hears the sounds.
- Plan enriching play activities with friends who speak Mandarin as their first language.
- Show her a picture, an object or an experience that she can remember and relate to new words she is hearing in daily conversations with you. But don’t give in to the pressure of using flash cards, which may be rather abstract.
- Look for Mandarin books with attractive illustrations and simple sentence structures. Read the stories to her and she will soon hear the rhyme and rhythm of each word.

