

Words matter: Disability

The words we use can open doors to understanding, respect, dignity and support for people to lead the lives they want. Words can also create barriers, stigma or stereotypes that are demeaning and rob people of their individuality.

Here are some positive Samoan words or phrases to use to describe disabilities or people with a disability.

Disability (general)	
Tagata ua le ato'atoa le malosi	People with a disability, or people not as capable as others and/or who struggle to live an independent lifestyle.
Lē ato'aatoa le malosi o le tino po'o le mafafau	Physical and mental health are not fully functioning.
Blind or vision impaired	
Tauāso	Blind.
Le atoatoa le va'ai	Vision impaired.
Fa'aletonu le va'ai	Having problems with sight.
Deaf or hearing impaired	
Logonoa ma lē lelei le fa'alogo	Deaf or having problems with hearing.
Wheelchair user	
Le o lo'o fa'aaogaina le nofoa feavea'i mo se fesoasoani	Person who uses a wheelchair for assistance.
Age related issues	
Fa'afitauli feagai ma tagata matutua ua loa lo latou soifua	Challenges faced by elderly people.
Person who uses mental health or addiction services	
O le tagata o loo faaogaina auunaga faapitoa mo gasegase ole mafafau	Mental health or addiction service user or users.

Avoid negative words

Here are some examples of negative Samoan words or phrases which should not be used to describe disabilities or people with a disability.

Tagata mama'i or ma'i	'Sick people'. General term which refers to people with a sickness or disability or someone who is not 'normal'.
Vale	Crazy or dumb - a popular casual term to refer to anyone with a mental illness, mental impairment or someone who is intellectually disabled.
Mala	'Curse'. Term which implies that a person's condition is caused by a curse put on a person because they have breached a tapu.
Ulu leaga	Crazy head or someone who has a problem with their head or mind. An informal phrase for someone who has a mental health issue and is easily upset.
Faipe	Informal term to refer people who are deaf or hearing impaired.



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