

disabled flexible interaction compensate savant retain estimate
predictable benefits astonishing image anxious

Autism and autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) are names given to groups of complex developmental disorders involving the brain. Some of the symptoms of these disorders are problems with verbal and non-verbal social **interaction**, the display of repetitive behavior, and an inability to be **flexible**. Many people with ASD **compensate** for these challenges and are able to be high-functioning and lead “typical” lives. Others are more **disabled** by the disorder.

ASD is an umbrella term that includes many subcategories. One subcategory is autistic **savant**. Psychologists **estimate** that 10 percent of people with ASD have some savant abilities. An autistic savant is a person with an unusual ability, skill, or knowledge that is much more developed than that of an average person. Many savants are able to **retain** large amounts of information in their memory. For example, some autistic savants can recite entire dictionaries or telephone books word-for-word. Others are able to draw detailed maps of an area after flying over it once in a helicopter. Although autistic people with savant abilities have these specific skills, they may have difficulty with other types of mental or physical tasks.

Daniel Tammet is an autistic savant. For Daniel, as for many people with ASD, leading a **predictable** life has many **benefits**. In other words, life is easier for him if it has structure and routine. If it does not, he may become **anxious**. One of Daniel's special abilities is in mathematics. He is able to solve complex math problems almost immediately. When he does this, he sees each number he is calculating as an **image**. These images transform into a third image, which is the sum.

Why autistic savants have these **astonishing** abilities is a question that still has no definitive answer.