

Savant Syndrome Encyclopedia Article

Savant Syndrome

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Savant Syndrome

Below normal intelligence combined with a special talent or ability in a specific area.

Also known as autistic savant or idiot savant.

Children who display savant syndrome have traditionally been referred to as idiot, retarded, or autistic savant. (The negative connotations of the term "idiot" have led to the disuse of idiot savant; because the syndrome is often associated with **autism**, the latter term is more frequently heard.) Persons with savant syndrome have an exceptional talent or skill in a particular area, such as the ability to process mathematical calculations at a phenomenal speed. These individuals have been the subject of much scientific study, although the nature and cause of their seemingly contradictory abilities is not well understood. Savant syndrome affects more males than females.

Savant skills occur in a number of different areas, including music, visual arts, and mathematics. Experts believe that the most common skills demonstrated by savants is extraordinary memory. Persons with savant syndrome may be able to memorize extensive amounts of data in such areas as sports statistics, population figures, or historical and biographical data. One particular type of memorization common to those with savant syndrome is the ability to calculate what day of the week a particular date fell on or will fall on.

For Further Study

Books

Howe, Michael J. *Fragments of Genius: The Strange Feats of Idiots Savants*. London: Routledge, 1989.

Obler, L. K., and D. Fein (eds.) *The Exceptional Brain: Neuropsychology of Talent and Special Abilities*. New York: Guilford Press, 1988.

Treffert, D. A. *Extraordinary People*. New York: Harper and Row, 1989.

Periodicals

Sacks, Oliver. "Prodigies." *The New Yorker* 70, January 9, 1995, pp. 44+.