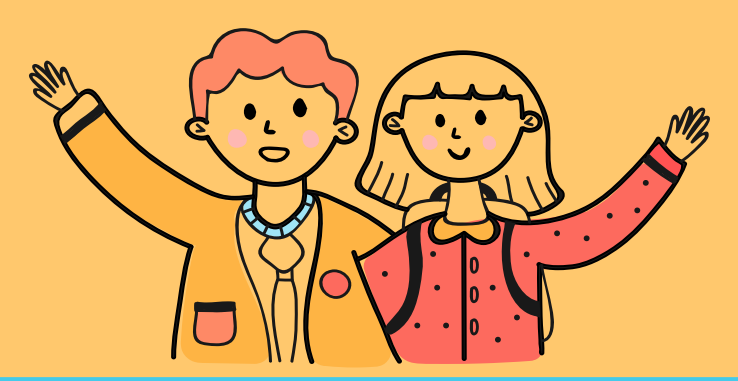


Understanding Separation Anxiety: A Guide for Parents



Charlotte Aitken

Many kids experience sadness or fear when they separate from their parent. It can be hard for parents to know what's age-appropriate and what's cause for concern

Key Facts

What is Separation Anxiety?

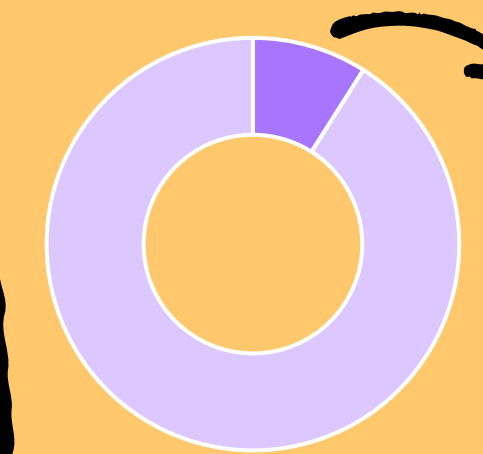
Separation Anxiety is the experience of children becoming upset or afraid at the thought or experience of separating from parents. Children may become unusually nervous or clingy when needing to separate from parents and may try to avoid being alone or with new people. It is most common in children under three years of age and typically resolves with time and experience.

Separation anxiety can be a sign that children have a healthy **attachment** to their parents and feel safest with their family

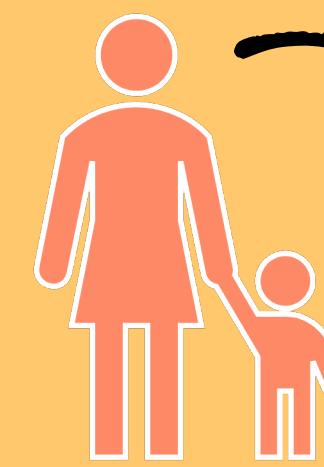


What is Separation Anxiety Disorder?

Separation Anxiety Disorder occurs when fears about separating from parents become severe and negatively impact the lives of children and their families. Children with separation anxiety disorder worry excessively about separation from parents in ways that are not typical for their age. Children's fears about separating from parents are persistent and intense.



Approximately 5-10% of youth will develop separation anxiety disorder



Separation anxiety disorder is the most common anxiety diagnosis in children under 12

Who does it affect?

While many children experience some separation anxiety, certain factors may make children more likely to experience separation anxiety disorder, including:

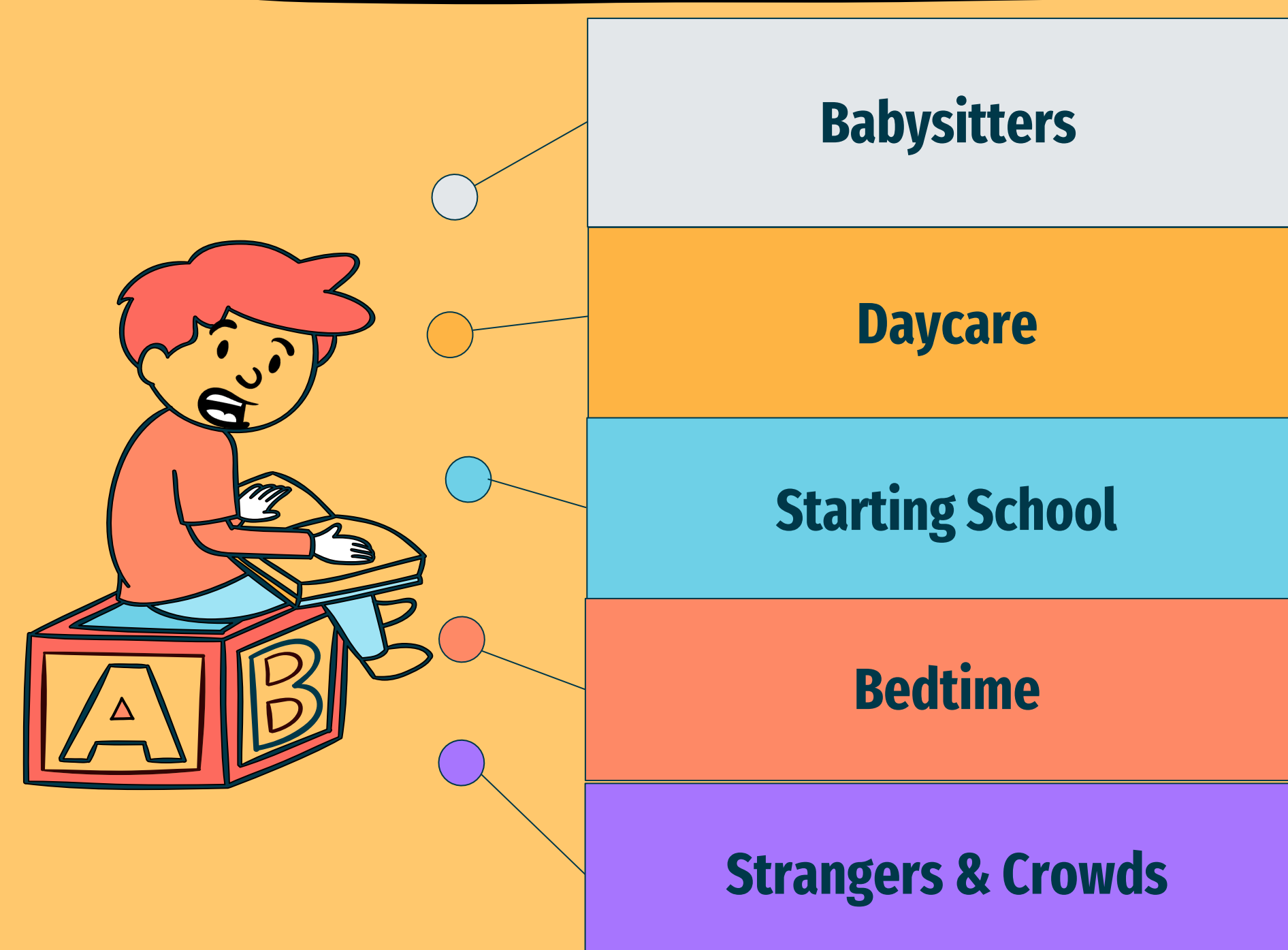
- Environmental factors, like experiencing a natural disaster or health event
- Recent grief or loss
- Recent change in routine or environment (e.g., moving, changing schools)
- Family history of anxiety disorders

What are the worries?

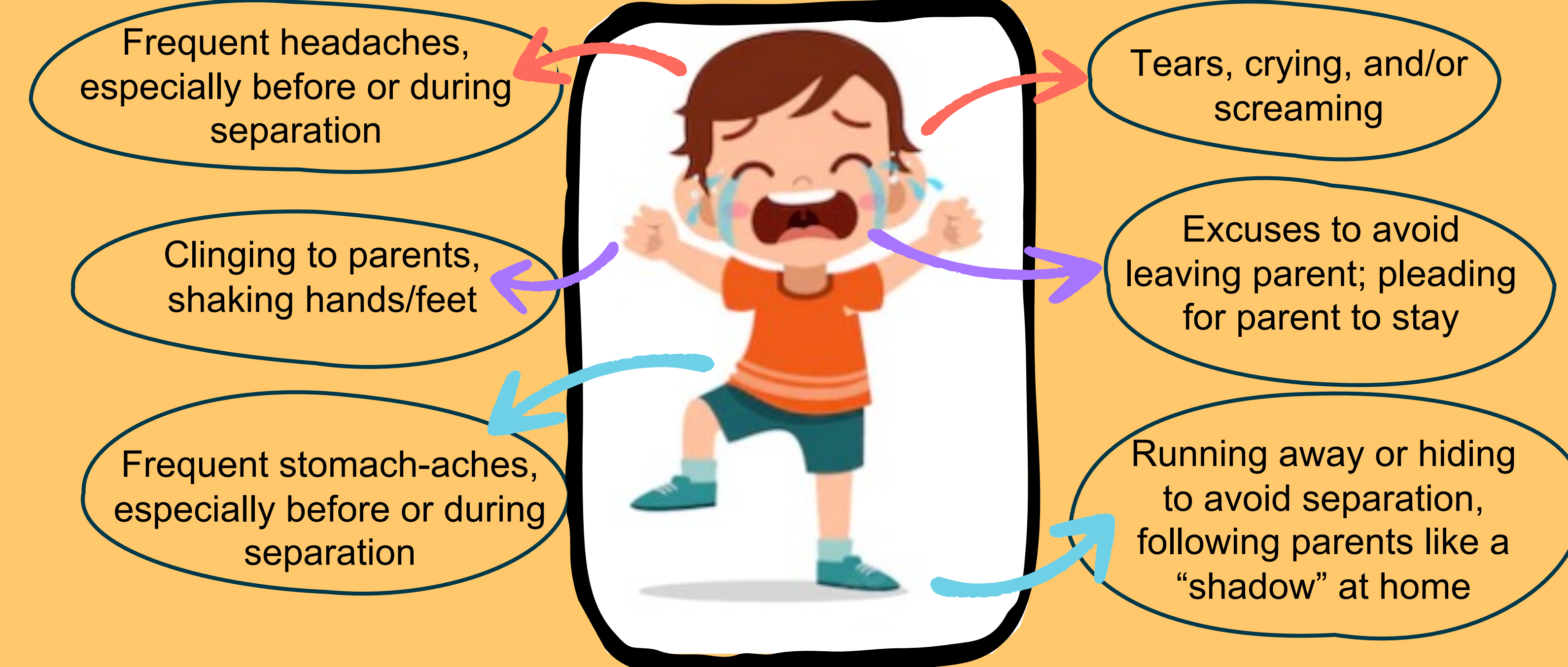


When does it happen?

Kids with separation anxiety and with separation anxiety disorder have difficulty when being left at home without a parent, or when being dropped off somewhere unfamiliar without a parent.

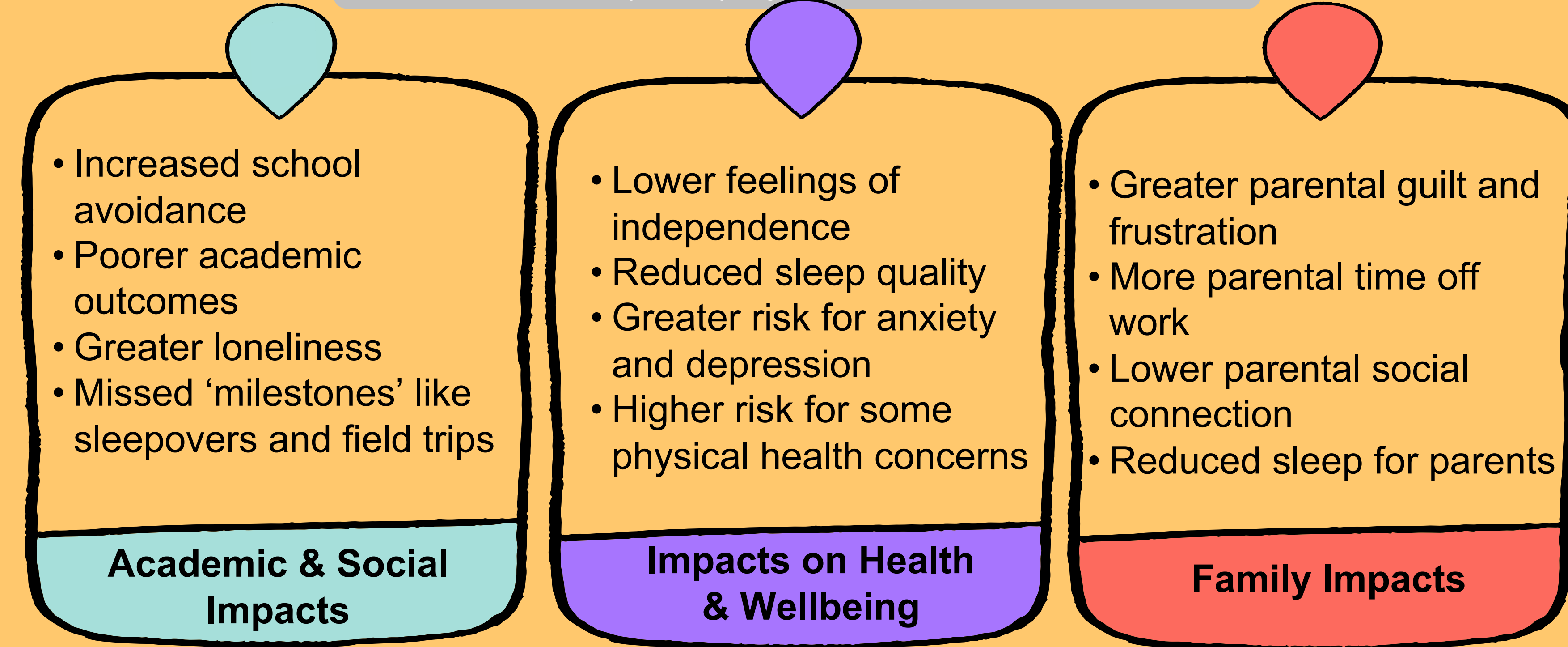


What does it look like?



Potential Impacts

Most kids get through separation anxiety without long-term impacts. However, when anxiety is very high, it can impact children and families.



Tips for Parents

- Prepare in advance.** Help children adjust by navigating new experiences with them. If starting a new daycare, make some parent-child visits together before their first day.
- Keep a routine.** Develop a consistent goodbye routine that's short and upbeat. Practice this routine in lots of different settings to help kids adapt.
- Return on time.** Tell kids when you'll be home in a way that they can understand ("I'll be home after you have dinner but before bedtime!"). Come home on time to help build trust.
- Practice makes perfect.** Start small to help kids adjust to separating. Consider having a familiar adult babysit for short periods of time and scale up experiences as kids adjust.
- Know when to seek help.** If your child's anxiety is impacting the wellbeing of themselves or others, it may be time to get help. Psychological interventions like cognitive behaviour therapy are highly effective at treating separation anxiety.

Resources



Scan me for extra resources for parents, and to see all the citations for this poster!

	"Typical" Separation Anxiety	Separation Anxiety Disorder
Who gets it?	Nearly all children, typically between 12 months – 3 years	Approximately 1 in 10 children develop separation anxiety disorder. It can be diagnosed at any age, including adulthood
How long does it last?	Will usually resolve on its own as children adjust to the new situation	Must be ongoing for at least 4 weeks in order to receive a diagnosis. Without intervention, can last months or years.
How do kids react?	May be upset for a short time, but usually adjust quickly – especially if distracted by something fun!	Can be upset for hours and struggle to adjust, even with distractions.
How does it impact sleep?	For most kids, separation anxiety will not significantly interfere with sleep	Kids may refuse to sleep alone, may have nightmares about separation, and may experience bedwetting

