

# Short and Long-Term Impacts of School Safety Drills: Student and Family Perspectives

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## Background

- Active shooter drills are now common in U.S. schools.
- Research shows mixed evidence regarding effectiveness.
- Concerns include anxiety, stress, trauma, and limited family communication.

## Purpose & Research Questions

Examine student and caregiver perceptions of school safety drills.

- Student perceptions of safety drills
- Short- and long-term impacts
- Family perceptions of school safety
- Understanding of drill procedures

## Methods

Constructivist grounded theory case study.  
55 survey participants; 16 interview participants.  
Data sources: online surveys and semi-structured interviews.

## Participants

N = 81 students represented  
Mean age = 9.2 years  
Age range = 5–15 years  
22.7% with IEPs

## Key Findings

- Fire and tornado drills were familiar and routine.
- Active shooter drills generated fear, anxiety, and vulnerability.
- Parents often learned about drills from children rather than schools.
- Communication before and after drills was frequently inadequate.
- Some families questioned the effectiveness of drills.

## Recommendations

- Improve family communication before and after drills.
- Consider developmental, disability, and trauma-related needs.
- Avoid highly realistic simulations.
- Include mental health supports and debriefing.
- Use evidence-based planning and evaluation.

## Implications

Schools should balance preparedness with student well-being.  
Careful planning can reduce harm while maintaining safety readiness.

