Sense of belonging in college refers to the connection a student feels to a community or group. Students who have a strong sense of belonging feel included, accepted, valued, and supported. A community that considers the needs of neurodiverse students in its planning and design supports their sense of belonging, well-being, and success.

The [Six Feelings Framework](https://oied.osu.edu/technologies/six-feelings-framework-autism-planning-and-design-standards) is a planning and design strategy that promotes a sense of belonging. It was developed as part of a research project by City and Regional Planning Students at the Ohio State University with the goal of creating environments where autistic adults can thrive. It identifies six essential feelings autistic individuals should experience in public spaces.

1. Feel connected: Spaces are easily reached, entered, and/or lead to destinations.
2. Feel free: Spaces offer relative autonomy and the desired spectrum of independence.
3. Feel clear: Spaces make sense and do not confuse.
4. Feel private: Spaces offer boundaries and provide retreat.
5. Feel safe: Spaces diminish the risk of being injured.
6. Feel calm: Spaces mitigate physical sensory issues associated with autism.

Though developed for physical spaces, the six feelings framework has application to classes, meetings, and events.

The advantages of this framework include:

* Spaces and experiences that are welcoming and accommodating for autistic individuals foster a **sense of belonging**.
* This framework promotes **universal design** by enhancing the overall experience for everyone.
* **Mental and emotional well-being** are promoted by addressing the needs outlined in the six feelings framework.
* Environments that address the unique sensory and emotional needs of neurodivergent individuals promote **community integration/involvement**.
* Prioritizing safety concerns and reducing the risk of injury create a **sense of security**.

Examples of applications of the six feelings framework to a classes, events, and meetings include:

* Feel connected:
  + Provide course information and resources online in a format that can be easily accessed.
  + Promote a range of opportunities for students to explore and develop skills related to their future careers. (department organizations, research opportunities, special topic lectures, etc.)
* Feel free:
  + Multiple formats for tutoring and other supports i.e. in-person, online, group.
  + Personalized advising that gives attention to the student’s individual goals and priorities.
* Feel clear:
  + Clear signage and directions.
  + Clearly outlined course expectations and assignments.
  + Clear and consistent communication, clear instructions provided through consistent channels.
* Feel private:
  + Opportunities for students to anonymously submit questions.
  + Ensure that confidential topics are discussed privately.
* Feel safe:
  + Safety training and clear warning and emergency signage.
  + Share academic and well-being support resources multiple times in multiple formats.
* Feel calm:
  + Be aware of potential sensory concerns in the physical environment and take steps to mitigate them.
  + Incorporate a short stretching break.
  + If using PowerPoint slides, include a few slides that highlight resources and activities to reduce stress.

**Resources**:

[Autism Planning and Design Guidelines 1.0](https://oied.osu.edu/technologies/six-feelings-framework-autism-planning-and-design-standards), Knowlton School of Architecture, City and Regional Pllanning Program (Guidelines can be downloaded from linked site.)

[Responsive Design](https://read.nxtbook.com/acuhoi/talking_stick/november_2023/responsive_design.html), Shannon Dowling and James Baumann