

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS:

Meaning, the Restlessness of Mastery, and the Search for an Authentic Life

FAMILY DISCUSSION GUIDE

Use this guide to connect as a family, talk about what really makes us happy, and practice being true to who we are.



1. BEFORE WATCHING

Set the stage and open hearts and minds.

- Can you think of a time you really wanted something, got it, and then still felt let down?
- Younger kids: what is something you are really good at, and does being good at it always make you happy?



2. WHILE WATCHING

Pay attention to feelings, choices, and turning points.

- Jack is the best at what he does, so why does he seem so sad and restless?
- What makes the new thing he discovers feel so exciting, and where does his excitement get him into trouble?
- Who around him seems to see clearly what he cannot?



3. AFTER WATCHING

Reflect together and make meaning.

- Why do you think being the best at Halloween stopped being enough for Jack?
- What went wrong when Jack tried to become someone he was not?
- What finally helped him feel better about who he already was?



4. FAMILY REFLECTION

Go deeper with empathy, honesty, and connection.

- What is something good in our own everyday life that we sometimes forget to appreciate?
- Older kids and teens: where do you feel pressure to be someone you are not, and what helps you feel like yourself?
- Try this: each person names one thing they are proud of about who they already are, not just what they achieve.



DR. Z TAKEAWAY

Success is not the same as meaning. The fulfillment we chase is often already here, in being who we truly are and appreciating the life we already have.