

Disney · PIXAR

COCO

A STORY OF TRADITIONS AND LEGACY

Disney Pixar's *Coco* follows the journey of young Miguel to find his great-great grandfather in the Land of the Dead. *Coco* provides us with a strong reminder that despite death, family history can transcend the years and continue to shape our families for generations to come.

For families that may be grieving, we are reminded of many themes we've experienced throughout our own grief journeys. These themes include those of traditions and legacy, touched on below, as well as identity and family, which are explored in *Coco, A Story of Identity and Family*.

HONORING OUR PERSON THROUGH TRADITIONS

Coco gives us a vivid and beautiful view into how tradition plays a large role in how we remember, honor, and keep those who have died in our lives.

For the Riveras and many families in Mexico, *Día de Muertos* is an important holiday in honoring and memorializing their person(s) who died. Families spend time cleaning, cooking their loved one's favorite foods, and decorating and placing flowers, candles and photos on an *ofrenda* (offering) table as a way of welcoming their loved ones back into their homes.

For families or children grieving the death of a loved one, traditions can play an important

COCO, A JOURNEY THROUGH THE LAND OF THE LIVING AND OF THE DEAD

Miguel's adventure begins on *Día de Muertos* (the Day of the Dead), the one time of year when those who have died can visit their families, and the living can honor them through *ofrendas* (offerings).

For the Rivera family, their great-great grandfather's abandonment of young *Coco* (Miguel's great-grandmother) results in a generations-long ban on music. *Abuelita* (Nana) Elena, the current matriarch of the Rivera family, is strict in her insistence that Miguel cannot be exposed to music, and goes as far as threatening an innocent Mariachi with her *chancla* (sandal) when he hands Miguel a guitar.

The Riveras are also stern in their wish for Miguel to become the next *zapatero* (shoemaker), just like the rest of the family. For young Miguel, who aspires to be a musician instead, his adventure begins when his *Abuelita* finds his homemade guitar and smashes it. At this, he finally yells, "This is unfair! This is my life; you've already had yours." Miguel runs away and ends up in a *cementerio* (cemetery), stealing the great singer Ernesto de la Cruz's guitar, and is sent to the Land of the Dead.

This beautiful and *poco loco* (little crazy) story unfolds as Miguel meets his ancestors, encounters magical *alebrijes* (folk art sculptures), and discovers the true meaning of family.

role in keeping those people in our lives. Death may sever the physical tie with our person, but the emotional connections remain. In many cultures there are special ways—both large and small—to honor and remember our person. There are many ways to do this, from lighting candles to releasing balloons, to setting a place at the table, creating an ornament for that person or donating in that person’s name. As we honor and remember our special person, it’s important to involve all members of the family when we create or adapt these traditions.

This is especially important for children—children of all ages. How do they want to honor, remember and stay connected to their person? What is helpful is to engage children in creating and participating in traditions that make them also feel connected. If our children are very young, we might create the traditions ourselves. Then, as they grow older, we can explain to them why we honor our loved ones in that particular way, and engage them in conversations on how they would like to participate.

KEEPING FAMILY LEGACIES ALIVE THROUGH STORYTELLING

In *Coco*, after Miguel meets Héctor in the Land of the Dead, they visit Chicharrón, who quickly fades away and then disappears. Hector explains to a confused Miguel that, *“He’s been forgotten. When there’s no one left in the living world who remembers you, you disappear from this world. We call it the Final Death. Our memories, they have to be passed down to those who knew us in life—in the stories they tell about us. But there’s no one left alive to pass down Cheech’s stories.”*



While for many this scene is heartbreaking, it reminds us of the power of storytelling in keeping a person in our lives. Miguel was able to visit Héctor, Mama Imelda, and his other ancestors. For those children who may never have met their person, or who were too young to remember them, storytelling can be a powerful way to know their family member who has died.

Also, many children fear that they never had any (or may not have enough) memories of their person, or that they will forget their person. Children need the help of their adults to share the qualities and stories about their person. It's important to share stories with children on many occasions—during significant events, or while celebrating holidays, or on special anniversaries or birthdays, or even on normal, routine days. The stories can share who the person was (what they liked, their profession, their favorite activities, foods they enjoyed, etc.), as well as some special memories we hold dear.

Coco is a strong reminder of the power of family, how our bonds and connections with those who died never end and how our traditions and stories keep our loved ones alive. To explore more about how this movie can shed light on our journeys of grief, see the companion article, **“Coco, A Story of Identity and Family.”** For additional support or information on grief-related topics, please visit us at highmarkcaringplace.com or follow us on social media.

