

To my readers—

In these unprecedented times, when space and access to food is limited and comparative suffering is prevalent, my hope is that *Taking Up Space* will help readers recognize how much they matter and see that, if something negative is taking up space in their minds, even if there isn't a name for it, they should ask for help.

As I was writing *Taking Up Space*, there were many moments when I thought about walking away, because telling this story was painful. I was scared to be honest about the mixed-up way I saw myself growing up—as a person who wasn't worth being loved or being fed. Like Sarah, the main character in this book, I felt I was taking up too much space in the world. And food was starting to take up all the space in my mind.

Even though learning to read was hard for me because I had undiagnosed ADHD—an experience I wrote about in *Focused*—books were always safe. In the library and in my local bookstore, I found stories about characters who were different, like me, in a back brace, which I explored in *Braced*. It also helped that in these special places there were always snacks.

As a kid, I spent a lot of time comparing my problems to other people's struggles and convincing myself that what I was going through didn't matter, when in reality everyone deserves to get the help they need.

*Taking Up Space* is about what happens when the adults you rely on aren't always dependable. And how bad information about food and bodies can get twisted up in your mind until the wrong facts start to mess up the way you see everything—even yourself. This is happening to a lot of kids—almost half of American children want to be thinner. It's about how puberty can make you feel uncomfortable and also strong. Ultimately, this book is about learning to trust that you're worth believing in, even on days you don't win or get picked, and about finding the courage to love yourself and to stand up for what you deserve.

Love,  
Aly Gerber