

AUTHOR'S NOTE

To my readers—

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, 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.

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 wasn't serious enough to matter, when in reality *everyone* deserves to get the help they need. Eventually, I did find the courage to ask for professional support, and I'm proud of how far I've come. I want you to know that I am still on this journey but I'm finally able to tell my story and advocate for others.

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 and start to mess up the way you see everything—even yourself. This is happening to a lot of people—almost half of American and Canadian kids want to be thinner. It's about how puberty

can make you feel uncomfortable but also strong. Ultimately, this book is about learning to trust that you're worth believing in and about finding the courage to stand up for what you deserve.

There isn't just one type of person impacted by low self-esteem, negative body image, disordered eating, and eating disorders. These challenges impact people of every age, size, weight, gender, race, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. You also can't look at someone and necessarily know if they're healthy or not. This means that many, many people face high barriers to getting the help they deserve. Listed here are resources where you can learn more:

National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)
nationaleatingdisorders.org

Child Mind Institute
childmind.org/topics/concerns/eating-and-body-image/

Perhaps, like me, you have gotten used to diminishing your own pain, whatever your struggle might be, thinking that it is less significant than someone else's. There will always be someone whose challenges seem more urgent, but yours are still important too. If something negative is taking up space in your mind, even if there isn't a name for it, you can and should ask for help. I hope you will. You matter.

Love,
Alyson