

Alex and the Amazing Dr. Frankenslime

Margot Desannoy

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Dad's the one who messed up in my family, but I'm the one who has to go see a therapist. On what planet does that make sense?

In *Alex and the Amazing Dr. Frankenslime*, a novel by Margot Desannoy for children ages nine to fourteen, tomboy Alexandra Kinslow faces some of life's toughest challenges—her parents' separation, her father's alcoholism, and an abusive home life. The story begins with Alex's mother forcing her to attend therapy. Twelve-year-old Alex has been violent, disrespectful, moody, and disinterested in school. Her mother believes that counseling may help her regain control. At first, Alex wants no part of this. She refuses to cooperate and acts out during sessions, hoping to force the therapist to give up. However, over time, Alex grows to trust the doctor and begins opening up her heart. While slow at first, the process brings the start of a brighter future as Alex learns to deal with the deep pain she has experienced.

Desannoy gently enlightens readers about psychiatric therapy as Alex finds healing through therapy and discovers what the process is like for children. Written from a young girl's point of view, the book examines the struggles a troubled child faces. The pain of a dysfunctional home life and the hope of a better family experience ring loudly to young readers, as the author tackles real-life hurt head on.

A licensed marriage and family therapist, Desannoy has worked with numerous children facing wide-ranging issues. She demonstrates a unique ability to understand the inner workings of troubled youth and works hard to create an authentic voice for her protagonist. Children will instantly relate to the main character's viewpoint. Even if they don't share her somewhat rebellious outlook, they'll gain empathy for others they know, perhaps class troublemakers, who are experiencing dysfunctional home lives. Desannoy offers a clear picture of therapy, removing the fear or mystery that causes kids who need it to shy away. At times she sometimes seems too overt, almost preachy, in her purpose, allowing her message to overshadow her storytelling.

Nevertheless, this book offers parents, teachers, and family counselors a useful resource and a fairly compelling read to offer children in several categories: those who are struggling, those beginning counseling, those afraid of counseling, and those who would benefit from empathy with others who are, on the surface, a bit harder to befriend.

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