



ADHD, Anxiety, & More: The Berndt Family's Story With Wendy Berndt

WB

Wendy Berndt

0:00

Yeah, and, you know, it's hard to say, like, what did we avoid, right, by doing all the steps that we've done and getting out of the mold? But I can't even imagine where we would be if we hadn't uncovered this, if we had stayed, if I would have initially gone down the route of...the typical route of doing testing for ADHD, right? My son would have probably been put on a medication. Eventually, my daughter would have been put on an anxiety medication. I would have probably been put on a medication at some point for my own anxiety. And so, you know, just thinking through, like, the route that didn't happen because of the changes that we made. But the biggest single change that we made was we getting out of the mold. So, we did do remediation.

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Kendra Seymour

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Welcome to *Your Indoor Air* podcast brought to you by Change the Air Foundation. My name is Kendra Seymour, and today is one of those real stories of healing and hope after mold exposure. My guest today is Wendy Berndt, and as you will hear, her life was forever changed when she uncovered the invisible culprit behind her family's health struggles: toxic mold. What began as a desperate search for answers evolved into a mission to empower others. As she navigated her children's health challenges with ADHD, anxiety, emotional regulation, Wendy immersed herself in learning, fueled by her desire to heal her family. Now a certified FDN-P, she combines her personal journey with nearly 20 years of experience as a health benefits consultant, offering a unique perspective on wellness and recovery. With a strong commitment to helping other families facing similar struggles, Wendy aims to inspire hope and resilience on their path to healing. Wendy, thank you so much for being here and for sharing your story with us today.

WB

Wendy Berndt

1:39

Yes. Thank you so much for having me.

KS

Kendra Seymour

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I think one of the things that really resonated when I first heard your story was that as a mother, I know

what it means to, kind of, go to the ends of the earth for your child, right? When the doctors and those around you, we can't figure out what's going on, and you have that feeling inside that there's something here, I have to keep pushing, and I have to keep, you know, digging to solve this. And so, I would love for you to start off by just kind of sharing, you know, your story with mold in your home, what happened, and kind of how it impacted your family.

WB

Wendy Berndt

2:16

Yes, absolutely. So, my family lived in a home with hidden mold for about seven and a half years. Obviously, like many other families, we had no idea it was there. We, you know, lived in a great suburb. It was a very nice house. But it wasn't until my son was displaying signs of symptoms for ADHD that we really started to dig into, okay, how can we help him? So, I had kind of a crossroads of, I can go to the pediatrician and they'll likely do medication, but I decided...I opted for a more natural route first to, you know, see if there was a way we could reduce the symptoms without starting medication. So, we went down that path. And through some lab testing, we actually uncovered that there was quite a bit of mold in his system. And so, I was...you know, I kind of chalked it up to, "That doesn't seem like a big deal, like I'm sure that's maybe just from some food or something like that." So, we continued on, and we were making some diet changes to try to help. And then my daughter started having some really high amounts of anxiety. And so, I ended up—you know, kind of going down this path already—decided to get her tested as well. And it also came back with high amounts of mold in her test. So, at that point, the practitioner that we were working with said, "Hey, you know, I think there could be something going on here. You might want to dig a little bit deeper." I, again, kind of put it off for a little bit, thinking, okay, maybe it's some old carpet in our house. So, we waited a bit and then decided to change out the carpet. So, we pulled it back, and in the corner, there was just a little dark spot. And so, you know, knowing we were kind of maybe looking for mold, we decided to investigate further. And my husband cut a hole in the wall (which I wouldn't recommend doing, but we had no idea at the time), but he cut a hole in the wall and just happened to hit the right spot. And there was a ton of mold behind the walls; it had all been hidden.

And when I think back, you know, once we moved into the house, we all started having some symptoms. It was a very...it's like a slow play. Started off with, like, sinus-type of symptoms to, like, kind of like a chronic sinus infection. And it was so easy for me to chalk it up to I had just started a new job, and my youngest was starting a new daycare, and so he was bringing home all the germs, and we were just working on, you know, building his immune system. And so, you know, it was easy for me to just slowly say, "Okay, these changes are normal." But then, fast forward after, you know, breathing it in for so long, it really started to impact in showing up in the kids with emotional dysregulation, the anxiety, the brain fog. I started experiencing brain fog, irritability; the fatigue really started to take hold. But again, chalking all these things up to "Life is hard. Life is complicated. You know, this is normal for my age. You know, I'm just getting older and I'm stressed." And, you know, all the things that we kind of, you know, make ourselves...tell ourselves, to make us feel better, right? So, we started down that path, found lots of mold, and ended up going through a remediation process.

I don't...I didn't, at the time, know as much as what I know now about remediation, and so we kind of did all of that wrong. In fact, we actually stayed in the home during remediation. There was nothing vented to the outside. There was no negative air pressure. It was...and even the people coming to do the

remediation weren't even wearing masks themselves. So, they had told us it was okay to stay in the home for remediation, and when they took down the walls, it was...my kids' symptoms all just increased. My daughter started having a nosebleed. I started feeling very dizzy. My youngest was having issues with anger and rage. And it just, it was very clear to me that I could tell that mold was really what was impacting them.

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Kendra Seymour

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I think...well, first, I'm so sorry that this happened to you. But what you are describing, I think, resonates with so many people's journey. Starting with the fact that, you know, it's often hidden, right? You can't see it, you often can't even smell it, and so then people think, "Well, I don't have a problem." And then...I was there. I've been there. And then, and then even my own understanding was like, "Oh, it's just an allergy." Like, it can impact you. And I think one of the challenges, and I've talked about this before, is you all had different symptoms in the home, right? This...

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Wendy Berndt

7:02

Yeah.

KS

Kendra Seymour

7:03

...it's really hard. I think that's one of the reasons why it tends to be overlooked. Because you assume if this was impacting us, we would all be affected the same way. And that's not how mold works. And not to get on a tangent, but if you head on over to our website, ChangeTheAirFoundation.org, for anyone listening, under our Research tab, we have a "Conception to Grave." We have an interactive feature, or you can download the paper we wrote, and it talks about all the symptoms—from starting in utero until old age—and the different ways that mold can impact you. And there's 60 peer-reviewed studies there. And it's everything from anxiety to chronic sinusitis to, you know, many of the things you describe. And so, we tend to think...I know, with my journey and so many I talked to, you know, "Oh, the eczema is unrelated to the food allergies, which is unrelated to my fatigue because I'm a new mom, which is unrelated." And maybe some of these things are. But I think it's time we start asking some of these questions: What? What is going on? What changed? So, if you don't mind, can you talk to us for a minute about the remediation company? Because I know I've been there: guilty. I just went online, hired the first five-star remediation, you know, company I found, and I didn't realize that there really aren't regulations in place. So, when you first tackled that as a homeowner, like, kind of, what was going through your mind? How were you picking a company...

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Wendy Berndt

8:28

Like that!

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Kendra Seymour
8:29
...here a little bit?

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Wendy Berndt
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Yes. So, like any good research that I do, I went straight to Facebook, to my local mom group.

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Kendra Seymour
8:36
Yeah.

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Wendy Berndt
8:37
And I was, like, okay, typing in “mold” to see who of my, you know, local community members recommended or used for mold remediation. It wasn't...there wasn't a lot of information out there. Because obviously, it's not something people, like, talk about in community groups of “Oh, hey, I use this mold remediator, you know, you might want to try them out.” But there was one realtor who was mentioning a mold company that they had recommended for, you know, some of their clients. So, I called that company. I had them come out, and they did the testing, and they did the remediation, and I asked them to please complete, you know, pre- and post-testing, you know? So, I was doing all the things incorrectly, right, of using the same company to do both the pre-, the post, and the remediation. I didn't look any further into what somebody had recommended, so I didn't ask any questions about how the remediation was done. They just came, and I just took their word for it, because I'm like, “Oh, you know, they seem to know what they're doing. This isn't my strong suit. I'm not an expert in this area. So yes, of course, I'll call the experts. They'll come and take care of it.”

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Kendra Seymour
9:53
Yeah, I've been there.

WB

Wendy Berndt
9:56
Yeah. So, when they came, they did...it was very interesting. So, they did put up the 6-mil plastic; they did have some air scrubbers running. Nobody was...had any kind of mask on or any kind of PPE to protect themselves. Which was quite interesting because it was also COVID, during a period when everybody was supposed to be wearing masks anyway, but especially in that industry, right? So, they put up their 6-mil plastic, and they would start to open the walls. And then I noticed, at one point, I had a picture hanging within the plastic. So, it was never moved out. At some point, even with all the walls open, they took the picture off the wall and then opened the plastic and then sat it on a couch that was sitting right

there. And you know, in hindsight, I'm like, "Oh, wow, that, you know, picture frame, the pictures, all...it's going to have mycotoxins and mold all over it, right?" Because they're disturbing all of that as they're trying to scrub it off the walls. And then they just open the plastic and put it right on the couch that's sitting right there. So, all of the things, I definitely did incorrectly. So thankful now that there's Change the Air Foundation, all the work you guys are doing, of all the guides that are available, and the remediation one-on-one videos. All of that stuff is so valuable because people don't know. I mean, you know, it's hard to know, and you assume that they have this business and they're in the remediation field, and so that they know what they're doing.

KS

Kendra Seymour

11:21

Right? Like, if you go to a doctor or a dentist, or you go to get your hair colored, like, you go to the mechanic...you assume that that person knows what they're doing and how to keep themselves safe, you safe. And you don't realize how wildly unregulated this industry is. And you know, we have a Mold Remediation Mini Class series that you can find on our website under our Resource tab. And David Myrick is one of the remediators. And he...I'm going to butcher the quote, so I'm just going to paraphrase. He talks about, you know, when they're remediating, you know, tens of billions of spores, fragments, are going airborne. And their version of malpractice, as he says, is when that cross-contaminates the rest of your home. And I think what is so hard is you as a lay person...they had some plastic up. Well, that kind of looks right. And they have this machine that's cleaning the air that can...those are the trickiest ones, because I think that looks right or whatever.

WB

Wendy Berndt

12:18

Right.

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Kendra Seymour

12:19

So, one of the things...my passion, like, in this world...the last decade, is to help people (the homeowner, the renter) understand what good remediation looks like. Or, I like to say what safe and effective remediation looks like. And so, for those listening, just in case you're like, freaking out, maybe you've made the mistakes like Wendy and I. It's okay. These things...let's make a plan. There are a couple resources I want to highlight. You can go to our Start Here tab under our Resources, and if you go nowhere else, that one literally takes you through step by step. So, Wendy, you talked about how, oh, I used the same person for the inspection and the remediation and the testing? We talk about why you don't want to do that. It's a conflict of interest. It's been illegal in some states. But we'll take you through, under that Start Here section, everything you need to know. There's also our free downloads. And so, we realize that you as the homeowner are busy, you're tired, you're maybe not feeling well, you're taking care of sick family members. So, we're trying to make this process as accessible and visible to you as possible. But Wendy, I mean, we're nodding along. I think you and I, when we first talked, bonded over the fact. Like, yeah, I made every single mistake in the book. It happens. So, what, when it came to your children and your guys's health, what interventions and treatment did you find to be most helpful? Like, how are you all feeling now? I guess...

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Wendy Berndt

13:42

Yeah...

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Kendra Seymour

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...is a good place to start.

WB

Wendy Berndt

13:44

Yeah, that's a great question. So, we're doing well. I mean, I think, you know, saying 100%, right? I don't know that perfection exists at any age, right? But we're all doing great. We went from emotional dysregulation, brain fog, you know, severe chronic fatigue, rage, anger, brain inflammation types of symptoms to we are functioning. We are not refusing to go to school. We are going to school happily, partaking in classes, able to learn. You know, staying on target. You know, my daughter's a straight A student. It's remarkable from where we've been. And you know, it's hard to say, like, what did we avoid, right? By doing all the steps that we've done and getting out of the mold? But I can't even imagine where we would be if we hadn't uncovered this, if we had stayed, if I would have initially gone down the route of...the typical route of doing testing for ADHD, right? My son would have probably been put on a medication. Eventually, my daughter would have been put on an anxiety medication. I would have probably been put on a medication at some point for my own anxiety. And so, you know, just thinking through, like, the route that didn't happen because of the changes that we made. But the biggest single change that we made was we getting out of the mold. So, we did do remediation.

After I did remediation and started educating myself a little bit more on remediation, I realized that I don't know that we're going to be able to heal in this house that's made us sick. So, we went through with remediation and buttoned everything up, moved out of the house. But that was the single biggest thing that I think we could have done. Because, you know, kind of two part of...you second guess a lot. Like, even after leaving our house, like, symptoms didn't just totally disappear. You know, for some people that works and that's amazing, but not for everyone. For our family, some of us became colonized with mold, and so we now had to take bigger measures. But if we would have been living in the home, I would have constantly been second guessing: Is there mold somewhere else, or is the mold still circulating in the home? And so, for us, that was our biggest path to healing, was step one.

But then throughout the process, it's really been different for each of us at different points in time. So, at one point in time, the biggest thing that helped me was so simple...was just getting outside every day for 45 minutes and taking a walk. That was huge. And it was the sun; it was the extra Vitamin D that I'm getting. It was a lot of those things, and even just the act of walking to move my body, to help with detoxification. And then increasing my water intake. At another point, I brought in a specific supplement, SPM Supreme, that really helped with my brain fog. And so, you know, it's kind of just different layers throughout the process. There wasn't one specific thing that was like the "Aha" that worked for all of us at any moment in time. For my kiddo, who ended up with the PANS, with rage-type symptoms and brain

inflammation, the biggest thing that has helped him was a prescription anti-fungal. And so that was hugely important for him. So, he ended up using itraconazole—and it was a game changer—just because his body was very much struggling to get the mold out. And he was my kiddo that was born into that house when, you know, as a baby, the other two...we moved into the house after they were born. He was there all the time, we had a sitter come to the house for him, and so he just never left the home. Which, you know, I think that made a big difference for him.

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Kendra Seymour

17:24

Yeah, I understand that completely. I think, too, when it comes to children, it's...they're not necessarily little adults. I know Dr. Crista talks about that. And if you're listening and you have a child, we have two really fantastic interviews, one with Dr. K and one with Dr. Crista (and we'll link to them) that specifically talk about mold and children. Because I know it's an extra layer that you have to think about. Looking back (and I tend not to dwell on the past), but looking back, what would you have done differently? Or what did, you know, if you could go back and kind of wave that magic wand?

WB

Wendy Berndt

18:04

Yes. So, I would have tested sooner. I waited months in between hearing that mold might be, you know, something impacting us, before I started investigating our home. So, I definitely would have checked it out sooner. For anyone listening, if you're told that mold might be the root of the cause of some issues that you're having, just get it checked out. Test your home, test your body; see what's going on. That would have been my first step. I would have done that sooner. And then I would have, you know, looked a little bit further into the remediation stuff to understand truly. Instead of just picking the first person that I found in my local group, I would have investigated that to learn and educate myself before bringing someone in.

KS

Kendra Seymour

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Yeah, I think too, just to add on one element and to kind of hammer the point home a little bit, there's only seven states that actually require any kind of certification and licensure from mold remediators. So more or less, I could go to bed tonight and wake up tomorrow and call myself a mold remediator. But even that, in those seven states, you have to keep in mind that those are minimal starting points, because not all certifications and licensers are the same. And then, what...just because someone's certified doesn't mean they're going to follow through. So, you really do have to take the time to vet and hire carefully, and we have all of those resources available for people who are looking to do that. Now, your professional life, because of your experience, kind of coincides now with, like, mold and health and healing. Can you tell us a little bit about some of that work and advocacy? Because I know you're all about giving hope, not just information, but letting people know that there's a light at the end of the tunnel.

WB

Wendy Berndt

19:42

Yes, yes, for sure. So, you know, once you understand the impact that mold can have, it's hard to not shout it from the rooftops. It's hard to not tell everyone you know that's dealing with some kind of a chronic illness or a mental health condition or anything like that, like, "Hey, have you checked into mold? This could be a root cause." And so that's where I find myself. So, you know, my corporate job is something very different, but I'm very passionate about helping other families to understand, you know, what could be that root cause and how they can move forward, knowing that this is a difficult road. It's not, you know...the reason why mold is so complicated is that it's not just your body that you're dealing with an issue, but it's everyone who's living in your home in the same space is typically dealing with different issues, and it's your home, and it's all your belongings. So, it becomes...there's a financial barrier that happens there too. Because, you know, while we want to just get everyone tested and everyone helped all at once, you know, it's very it can be very costly. And then you're trying to figure out what to do with your home. And so, my passion is really to help families to understand and get them the help and support that they need. You know, if they can learn from all the mistakes that I made along the way, and if I can share that information to help them, then I'm happy to do so.

You know, it's so difficult in so many ways at different points in the journey, and there's lots of ups and downs. But it's important to know that the body is wanting to heal. And every day is a new day to work on healing, and every day is a step closer towards that. So, there's definitely a light at the end of the tunnel. It just...progress is slow, and it just takes time. And over time, you know, it's just like our kids grow. You don't notice how much they're growing until you look back and you check on the wall, and you're like, "Oh, wow, you grew two inches in the last year! Three inches in the last year!" Same with our health and healing, right? You...it's baby steps to get there. And when you look back and you say, "Wow, I can't believe the progress that we've made," it's truly amazing. It's just a testament to the body and how it's always trying to heal.

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Kendra Seymour

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Yeah, you kind of hit on something that I always say: this is about progress over perfection, right?

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Wendy Berndt

21:57

Correct, yep.

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Kendra Seymour

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That's why one of the messages here is to kind of research before we react. We're so tempted to be, like...especially if you can see it, or you find it, and then all of a sudden it...out, or your spouse is putting bleach...no, no, no...

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Wendy Berndt

22:07

Right.

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Kendra Seymour

22:08

...make a plan, right?

WB

Wendy Berndt

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Absolutely.

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Kendra Seymour

22:11

And I think that's what's hard about this, because it it's a little bit of a marathon at times. But there are success stories, and that's why we try to bring, you know, people like you on so we can have these conversations. And people can realize, "Hey, maybe that sounds like me. Maybe I need to look into this." And sometimes, it's just a matter of taking that first step. So, if someone right now is listening and they're in the middle of this, or maybe they're just beginning, what advice do you have for them?

WB

Wendy Berndt

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So just take baby steps. Look at all of the Change the Air Foundation resources that are available. And then one of the main things that you can start to do, like, if you're just beginning and you don't know where to turn? One of the biggest things that I think is so awesome that costs nothing is to spend time outside. That's going to help to reset your nervous system. Like, listen to nature, go for a walk. And I know it sounds, like, so simple, but truly it is one of those things that can help to calm me down. It can help to get fresh air. Do that daily, right? And then start to look through the resources so you're not overwhelmed, and then go from there. Make a plan, as you just said. And, you know, just know that every day, doing some of these things, little by little, is going to add up to, you know, the big stuff.

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Kendra Seymour

23:34

Yeah, yeah. That's great advice. I know some people too will say something like...or go stay with family for a couple days. Sometimes just a different space, and then with a little less exposure, you can think a little bit more clearly. Whatever you have to do, that you can just make a plan, right? Have that being your first step is so important. Wendy, thank you so much for being here today and sharing your story. I know that there's probably someone out there listening who maybe never thought about, like, ADHD and mold before, or never thought about anxiety and connection to indoor air quality. And it...we're at a point now where we spend 90% of our time indoors, breathing in air that's potentially bad for our health. And so many of the pollutants in there (it's not just mold) are invisible to the naked eye. And so,

it's worth us spending time thinking about those places where we live, where we work, where we go to school. So, thank you again. And for everyone listening, if you found this information helpful and you want to make sure that you get great information like this, along with tips and resources, directly to your inbox, head on over to ChangeTheAirFoundation.org and sign up for our newsletter. Thanks so much. We'll see you next time.