



Toulouse 302686: What to Expect

Toulouse is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Toulouse is a shy, sweet boy who is ready to find his forever home. Toulouse needs an understanding owner that is experienced with feline body language and has the time and desire to allow him to acclimate in his own time. Toulouse may never be a social butterfly with everyone he meets, but he will bond with his new family when given the time he needs to acclimate.

Toulouse was transferred from another shelter all the way from Texas, so we don't have much history on him. When he first arrived, he displayed fearful behavior in his kennel, hiding under his blanket and cowering. Toulouse never showed aggressive behavior towards people, but it was clear that the shelter environment was overwhelming for him. He also became sick with an Upper Respiratory Infection and while the team did a great job at treating him, the medical style handling coupled with his already fearful behavior was not conducive to helping him thrive. It was then decided to place him in the Behavior Modification Program. This program would allow us to work with him on his fearful behavior and help him recover from URI.

We found early on that Toulouse responds well to verbal encouragement, but it took him awhile to observe our movements to understand that he could trust us. Sitting near him, speaking softly, and offering slow eye blinks gave Toulouse the confidence needed to trust us. He also loves treats, especially Churus, and we used treats to build a positive association between people and food. Overtime, we encouraged him to come out of hiding using calm voices and tasty treats. It was until he saw another kitty in the program that Toulouse became even more confident. He was immediately drawn to the other kitty and wanted to become friends. Toulouse loves other cats and we saw his confidence and bravery flourish even more any time he had an opportunity to be around other cats. Being with his cat friends makes him feel more at ease and comfortable in his environment. Now that he has acclimated to the BMOD program he rarely hides and leans in for cheek and chin scratches.

Toulouse continues to be worried when loud and/or sudden movements occur. In these moments he will run and hide but easily recovers with gentle calming voices. Once a bond and relationship are formed with people, he will lean in for pets and headbutt to show his affection. His favorite activities are playing with toys, eating treats, and relaxing in the best sunspots. Other cats have been crucial in helping him build confidence. Toulouse will need to find a home where there is another cat for him to have as a friend.

His new family should expect that he will hide for a few weeks, possibly longer. You'll need to introduce him to new things slowly. Toulouse typically flees and hides when overwhelmed or scared. If cornered, he may hiss, cower, and swat so it's important to not overwhelm him as he adjusts to his new home. It's important to provide him with a small room with appropriate hiding spots for him to relax in, such as his own hidey bed. Hiding spots that are confined to a tight spot and out of reach from you will make it difficult to build a bond with him. **He should not be given access to the whole home setting until he has acclimated to one room. The room you set him up in will be the catalyst for how quickly he acclimates.** Start thinking now which room in your home would be best for Toulouse to settle into. If it's a bedroom, can he get under the bed or dresser making it difficult to spend time with him? If it's a laundry room or bathroom will the constant in and out of people and noises associated with these rooms be too much for him? By having a room without a lot of foot traffic and with appropriate hiding spots, it will allow you to work on building a relationship. While in his hiding spot, use calm voices and offer tasty treats to show you are not a threat. Place a small amount of a wet food or a treat on a spoon and offer it to Toulouse while in his hidey spot. Or toss him a few crunchy treats. Bring the laser pointer or wand toy out and allow him to observe and engage with it. Over time, by continuing to do this, Toulouse will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food/playtime = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

Here's how to help Toulouse during your first months together:

This step is crucial in helping Toulouse acclimate to his new home. Confine Toulouse to one cat-proof room in your house. Provide Toulouse with a litter box, food, water, and a bed. Ensure he cannot get to *inappropriate* hiding spots (under the bed, in a closet, on top of a cabinet, etc.). Provide him with a safe, comfortable hiding place instead like his cat carrier, a hidey-bed, or a large dog crate covered with a blanket.

Spend time with Toulouse in his room. Don't force him out of his hiding spot. Instead, encourage him to come out on his own using happy talk, offering a Touch Tool, treats or toys. Once he is using the litter box, eating regularly, and coming out of hiding to interact with you, you can start introducing him to the rest of your home. Start by propping the door open and allowing him to come out on his own. Don't force it! If you come across something that you can tell Toulouse is worried about, allow him to hang back or hide if he chooses to do so.

Continue to provide a safe space. Even when Toulouse has started exploring the rest of the house, give him a safe space that he can retreat to. When he is in his safe space, insist that guests leave him alone and try to ignore him yourself. That way, when he comes out, you can reward his bravery with your attention.

No visitors (at first). Allow Toulouse time to adjust to your house, routine, and lifestyle before introducing him to new people. When you have visitors over, give Toulouse the freedom to make the decision to interact (or not!). Ask new people to ignore him – or if Toulouse seems curious or interested, have the new person toss him treats or offer a favorite toy. We want exciting, good things to come from new people.

Practice crate training. Leave his carrier out all the time, so it's just a part of his normal environment. Add a bed and keep the door securely propped open so he can go in and out on his own, making sure the door won't swing shut and frighten him. You can also clicker train him to run into the carrier on cue. Helping Toulouse get comfortable with his carrier will make it easier when it's time to visit the vet.

Visiting the vet: Unless it's an emergency, give Toulouse time to bond to you before taking him to the vet. Vet visits will more than likely be scary, but if he already trusts you, your presence may help him feel more comfortable.

Patience will come in handy for you. Toulouse is a cat that needs an understanding owner who has the time and desire to allow him to adapt in his own time. He may never be a social butterfly, and that's okay! Getting to know him and watching him come out of his shell will be extremely rewarding. Celebrate those small victories.

We're here to help!

We want Toulouse to be successful in his new home. We're available to answer questions via phone and email. Call the Behavior Helpline at (503)416-2983 or email Erika at erikas@oregonhumane.org to connect with the Feline Services Manager.

Please keep in touch so we can continue to help you and Toulouse now and in the future. Please reach out if you have any questions or concerns – or just to give an update. We love to see photos and hear how our friends are doing!

Thank you for adopting from the Oregon Humane Society. Congratulations on your new cat!