



Everest 320730: What to Expect

Everest is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Everest is a sensitive but sweet girl who needs a family that has the time and desire to allow her to acclimate in her own time. Everest has a history of being fearful with loud noises or sudden movements so she will do best in a calm and quiet home. Once she feels comfortable and knows she is safe, she is social, engaging and loves being pet.

Everest was surrendered by her previous family due to a potential breakdown in the human-animal bond. For the first couple of years in the home, Everest was noted to be social, affectionate and engaging with her family. About 9 months ago, a loud noise occurred in the home causing Everest to become very defensive towards the previous owner. The behavior Everest displayed was swatting, hissing and lunging. Since then, loud noises such as loud coughing, TV noises, or something being dropped on the floor has triggered Everest to swat, hiss and lunge at the previous owner on several occasions. The previous owner felt it best to rehome Everest and that's when she came to OHS.

When Everest arrived, she was placed in our Behavior Modification Program. The environment in the BMOD program is more conducive to helping cats feel comfortable in a shelter environment. With the larger kennel space, access to windows, quieter environment and increased one on one time with the team we set out to learn more about her.

Everest acclimated very quickly to the routine in BMOD, and after a week she was seeking out attention, leaning in for cheek and chin scratches and meowing at us for attention. While in our care, we have not witnessed any defensive behaviors towards us. We have played multiple noises in her presence, TV sounds, knocking on doors, coughing, dropping items on the floor, and she has never hissed, swatted or lunged at the staff. We are unsure why the relationship between Everest and her previous owner deteriorated and why Everest was unable to recover from it. She does tend to retreat to a safe space if she feels cornered or trapped so we make sure to give her enough space in these moments. It's possible the previous home was not big enough to allow her a space to safely retreat to, and when cornered she felt it necessary to display these defensive behaviors. Because of this, we feel it's best that Everest is not placed in a studio or small apartment. In some cases, a change in environment and a fresh start is all that is needed to fix the behavior. Everest enjoys playing with toys, being pet, and looking out windows. She has met several other kitties here and does not care for them. She will do best in a calm, quiet home as the only cat and with a loving and understanding owner.

Her new family should expect that she will hide for a few weeks, possibly longer. You'll need to introduce her to new things slowly. Everest typically hisses and swats when overwhelmed or scared, so it's important to not overwhelm her as she adjusts to her new home. It's important to provide her with a small room with appropriate hiding spots for her to relax in, such as her 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 her. She should not be given access to the whole home setting until she has acclimated to one room. The room you set her up in will be the catalyst for how quickly she acclimates. Start thinking now which room in your home would be best for Everest to settle into. If it's a bedroom, can she get under the bed or dresser making it difficult to spend time with her? 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 her? 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 her 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 Everest while in her hidey spot. Or toss her a few crunchy treats. Bring the laser pointer or wand toy out and allow her to observe and engage with it. Over time, by continuing to do this, Everest will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food/playtime = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

Here's how to help Everest during your first month together:

This step is crucial in helping Everest acclimate to her new home. Confine Everest to one cat-proof room in your house. Provide Everest with a litter box, food, water, and a bed. Ensure she cannot get to *inappropriate* hiding spots (under the bed, in a closet, on top of a cabinet, etc.). Provide her with a safe, comfortable hiding place instead like her cat carrier, a hidey-bed, or a large dog crate covered with a blanket. Once she is using the litter box, eating regularly, and coming out of hiding to play with toys, you can start introducing her to the rest of your home.

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

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

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

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

Visiting the vet: Unless it's an emergency, give Everest time to bond to you before taking her to the vet. Vet visits will more than likely be scary, but if she already trusts you, your presence may help her feel more comfortable. Patience will come in handy for you.

Everest is a cat that needs an understanding owner who has the time and desire to allow her to adapt in her own time. She may never be a social butterfly with everyone she meets but she will bond with her new family. Getting to know her and watching her come out of her shell will be extremely rewarding. Celebrate those small victories.

We're here to help!

We want Everest to be successful in her 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 Behavior Modification Manager.

Please keep in touch so we can continue to help you and Everest 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!