



Izzy 324232: What to Expect

Izzy is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Izzy is a sweet girl who needs a family that has the time and desire to allow her to acclimate in her own time. Once she feels comfortable and knows she is safe, she is social, engaging and loves being pet. Izzy will bond with her new family when given the time she needs to acclimate.

Izzy was transferred to OHS from another shelter and we don't have much history on her. When she arrived, she displayed fearful behavior, crouching low in her kennel, cowering and swatting any time the staff attempted to handle her. She was also diagnosed with stomatitis, which is a medical condition that can be quite painful. This condition causes severe inflammation of the tissues in the mouth, resulting in a bright red, irritated appearance to the gums, lip edges, soft palate, and the back of the oral cavity. This condition is thought to be caused by an overreaction by the cat's immune system to normal plaque bacteria, resulting in a severe inflammatory response. Because this inflammation is often caused by an overreaction to the plaque bacteria on teeth, a common way to manage this condition is to extract all (or almost all) of the cat's teeth. This is currently the only solution that seems to provide long-term relief from the pain and inflammation caused. In Izzy's case, she underwent oral surgery and had all of her teeth extracted.

Due to her fearful behavior and to help her recover from having all her teeth extracted, the decision was made to place her in our Behavior Modification program. The environment in the BMOD program is better suited at 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 and help her overcome her fears.

Izzy was very nervous for the first week in BMOD and spent most of her time observing us from her cat tower with wide eyes. We would sit in her kennel and talk softly to her and soon she was talking back, meowing and chirping when we came to visit her. We offered her tasty treats, Churus are her favorite, and she couldn't resist them. Offering her treats helped to build a positive association with people and helped her to understand we were not a threat. After a few days of offering her treats she felt brave enough to lean forward to sniff our finger. Soon she was leaning in for cheek and chin scratches and rolling around flirtatiously in her bed, headbutting and kneading. As her body language relaxed and she became more comfortable, she showed an interest in toys, batting at the wand toys when we played with her. She also showed curiosity and interest in meeting the other cats in the program and soon she was having playdates with them. What Izzy needed was time to feel safe where she wasn't pressured into doing anything. Once she knew we were her friends, she became the social butterfly we all know she could be.

Izzy's fearful behavior was most likely caused from being in a new place, with strange people and not understanding what was going on. Her medical condition most likely exasperated her fear, but now that she has had her teeth extracted she is pain free, happy and ready for her forever home. Izzy will do best in a calm, quiet home with someone that is patient with her as she adjusts to her new home. Izzy may enjoy having a cat friend in her new home, one that is calm and relaxed, and not one that wants to rough and tumble play with her. She would also do fine as the only cat in her new home. If you have a soft spot for sweet, playful, sensitive yet brave kitties, then Izzy is the one you've been looking for.

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. Izzy typically runs and hides 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 Izzy 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 Izzy 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, Izzy will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food/playtime = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

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

This step is crucial in helping Izzy acclimate to her new home. Confine Izzy to one cat-proof room in your house. Provide Izzy 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 Izzy 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 Izzy is worried about, allow her to hang back or hide if she chooses to do so.

Continue to provide a safe space. Even when Izzy 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 Izzy time to adjust to your house, routine, and lifestyle before introducing her to new people. When you have visitors over, give Izzy the freedom to make the decision to interact (or not!). Ask new people to ignore her – or if Izzy 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 Izzy 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 Izzy 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.

Izzy is a cat that needs an understanding owner who has the time and desire to allow him 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 Izzy 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 Izzy 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!