



## Ben 337783: What to Expect

**Ben is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a specific home.** Ben is a sweet and sensitive boy who is ready to find his forever home. Ben can be fearful and shy with new people but if you have the patience and time to help him acclimate you'll end up with a very sweet boy. His new owner should expect to be patient with him as he acclimates to his new home.

Ben came to OHS from another shelter and we don't have much history on him. When he arrived at OHS he displayed fearful behavior and would cower, hide and swat at hands when staff approached him. After several days with no change in his behavior, the decision was made to place him 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, increased enrichment, and one on one time with the team we set out to learn more about him.

For the first few days in BMOD, Ben hid on his cat tower and watched us with wide eyes. While in BMOD, we spent time building a relationship with him by sitting calmly in his kennel and talking to him. He would hiss and back away if he felt we were too close so we incorporated treats into every visit. At first, he would only eat the treats after we left his kennel but soon he was eating the treats right in front of us. He started to understand that having people visit meant he would be given treats and his body language began to relax. We also used toys to build a relationship with him and we learned very quickly that Ben loves to play. As we would soar the wand toy through the air he would stalk, chase and pounce on it with great delight. Ben also showed curiosity and interest in the other cats in the BMOD program and we allowed him to have playdates with the other kitties. Spending time with the other kitties, playing and snuggling with them, is when we saw his personality really shine. He loves being around other cats and will benefit from having a kitty friend in his new home. Ben has made tremendous progress here and he now seeks out our attention, loves being pet and enjoys having the staff visit with him.

What Ben needed was a quiet and calm environment before he felt safe enough to engage with people. Now that he is comfortable with the staff and has had the time he needed to acclimate, he is playful, loves being pet, chatty and curious. Ben continues to have moments where he startles from a loud noise but recovers quickly with verbal encouragement. If you have the patience and time to help him acclimate then you will end up with a sweet and loving boy. Ben will do best in a calm environment with another kitty 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. Ben typically flees, hisses and swats when overwhelmed or scared. 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. 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 Ben 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 wet food or a treat on a spoon and offer it to Ben while in his hidey spot. Over time, by continuing to do this, Ben will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

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

**This step is crucial in helping Ben acclimate to his new home. Confine Ben to one cat-proof room in your house.**

Provide Ben 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 Ben 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 toy or treats. 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 Ben is worried about, allow him to hang back or hide if he chooses to do so.

**Continue to provide a safe space.** Even when Ben 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 Ben time to adjust to your house, routine, and lifestyle before introducing him to new people. When you have visitors over, give Ben the freedom to make the decision to interact (or not!). Ask new people to ignore him – or if Ben 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 Ben 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 Ben 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. Ben 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 Ben 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](mailto:erikas@oregonhumane.org) to connect with the Feline Behavior Modification Manager.

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