



Catherine 336930: What to Expect

Catherine is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Catherine 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 knows who her friends are she is very loving and enjoys being pet. She may never be a social butterfly with everyone she meets, but she will bond with her new family when given time to acclimate.

Catherine came to OHS from the home of an overwhelmed cat caregiver and we don't have much history on her. When she arrived, she displayed fearful behavior, crouching low in her kennel, hissing and swatting any time the staff attempted to handle her. It was clear she was very scared and overwhelmed with her current situation so 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.

Catherine was nervous for the first week in BMOD and spent most of her time hiding in her bed and watching us with wide eyes. In the beginning, she would hiss if we got too close but we understood this was her way of communicating she was scared. We would talk softly to her every day and leave treats in her kennel to build a positive association with people. We found out pretty quickly that she loves treats and soon she was eating them from our hands. She continued to be nervous with hands approaching for pets so we worked on building trust by introducing a Touch tool. A Touch tool is anything that can be considered an extension of your hand. In her case, we used a back scratcher. As we brought the scratcher close, she would lean forward to sniff it. We then gently rubbed her cheeks for a second then reward with a treat. It didn't take her long to love being pet with the Touch tool and soon she was rolling around, purring and soliciting attention. She now loves being pet with hands and will meow at us for attention.

As time went on, her bravery flourished with people and she showed curiosity and interest in meeting the other cats in the program. She has met several other kitties here and is always happy to greet them and headbutt them. She would benefit from having a kitty friend in her new home. Catherine's favorite activities are taking naps, watching wildlife out the window, snacking on treats and playing with feather wand toys. She will do best in a calm, quiet home with a kitty to have as a friend.

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

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

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

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

Catherine 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 Catherine 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 Catherine 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!