



Wesley 329976: What to Expect

Wesley is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Wesley is an active and playful boy who is ready to find his forever home. Wesley can be sensitive to handling and needs an understanding owner that is experienced with feline body language. He enjoys being close by people and playing with toys but is still learning that being pet is something he could enjoy. Wesley may never be a social butterfly with everyone he meets, but he will bond with someone when given the time he needs to get to know you.

Wesley came to OHS from the home of an overwhelmed cat caregiver. When he arrived he displayed fearful behavior and also had several medical concerns that needed to be addressed, one of which required his eye to be removed. The busy chaotic shelter environment along with the medical style handling was overwhelming for Wesley, so he was placed into a foster home where he could decompress and recover. While in the foster home, Wesley was avoidant of touch and he did bite the foster parent on one occasion while they were trying to medicate him. It was a quick bite and release that did not require any medical attention. In the foster home, he met several other kitties and he did not enjoy being around them and ended up in a few scuffles and fights.

After Wesley recovered medically in the foster home, the decision was made to bring him back to the shelter and place him in our Behavior Modification program due to Wesley's ongoing fearful behavior both in the foster home and at the shelter. 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, Wesley 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. 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 Wesley loves to play. As we would soar the wand toy through the air he would stalk, chase and pounce on it with great delight. Soon, Wesley was meowing for our attention and always happy to have us visit but continued to struggle with being pet and continued to swat at hands when they approached. Because Wesley did not like our hands approaching to attempt to pet him, we instead used a Touch tool. A Touch tool is anything that can be considered an extension of your hand. In his case, we used a back scratcher. As we brought the scratcher close, he would lean forward to sniff it then quickly swat at it. Every time we presented the Touch tool to him we would also give him treats to build a positive association between the two. Overtime, Wesley would occasionally accept touch with the Touch tool but he was also good at letting us know when he didn't want to be touched.

All of this process took several months and while Wesley has made tremendous progress here his new family should expect to continue to work with him. Wesley loves being close by people, he's active and playful, chatty and cute, loves playing with all kinds of toys (even in water!), but he is still learning that being pet is something he could enjoy. He will need an experienced owner, someone that is familiar working with fearful cats and that has the time and patience to help him acclimate. Wesley does not enjoy being around other cats and will need to be your one and only true love.

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. Wesley 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 Wesley 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 Wesley while in his hidey spot. Over time, by continuing to do this, Wesley will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

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

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

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

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