



Ruby 261276: What to Expect

Ruby is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Ruby 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. She does not appreciate busy or chaotic environments, but in the right setting she is social with people, enjoys being pet and will headbutt for attention and love. She may never be a social butterfly with everyone she meets, but she will bond with her new family when given time to acclimate.

Ruby was originally adopted from OHS as a kitten in 2021. She was brought back to OHS recently as her family was unable to provide the appropriate environment for her. Her previous home was fairly busy, with young kids coming over regularly and another cat in the home. Ruby did not appreciate the activity in the home or living with another cat and would display defensive fearful behavior (hissing and swatting). When the home was calm and quiet, Ruby enjoyed being pet and would cuddle for short periods of time. The previous family felt their home was too busy for Ruby and made the decision to bring her back to OHS.

When she arrived at OHS, Ruby would alternate between seeking out attention and fearful behavior when staff attempted to handle her. When the shelter was quiet, Ruby would meow and headbutt for attention but when there was excess noise or if Ruby could see another cat, Ruby would hiss and swat at the staff. Due to Ruby's conflicted behavior, 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.

Ruby was nervous for the first week in BMOD and spent most of her time watching us with wide eyes and hissing if we approached her. We understood that this was her way of communicating that she was scared. In the beginning, we would talk softly to her every day and leave treats in her kennel to build a positive association with people. As she started to understand we were not a threat her body language relaxed and she began to meow at us for attention. We offered our hand for her to sniff and she showed curiosity, leaning forward to sniff it. As we gently rubbed her cheek and chin she started leaning into the touch and soon was rolling around and headbutting for more attention. Ruby enjoys being pet once she feels safe in her environment. She has limited sight of other cats in the BMOD program, but occasionally she does see one and she does not appreciate their company. She will hiss and become tense when she sees another cat and in these moments we know to give her space and allow her time to decompress. Ruby is sensitive to busy environments and prefers quiet and peaceful spaces. She responds well to verbal encouragement and slow movements. Ruby has shown tremendous progress here and we know that in the right home she will thrive even more.

Ruby's favorite activities are taking naps, looking out the window and meowing for attention. She does not like sharing her space with other animals and will need to be the only pet in her new home. She also doesn't appreciate an active home where kids are coming and going. Because of this, she will do best in an adult only home. If you have a soft spot for sweet, sensitive yet brave kitties, then Ruby 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. Ruby 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 Ruby 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 Ruby 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, Ruby will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food/playtime = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

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

This step is crucial in helping Ruby acclimate to her new home. Confine Ruby to one cat-proof room in your house.

Provide Ruby 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 Ruby 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 Ruby is worried about, allow her to hang back or hide if she chooses to do so.

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

Ruby is a cat that needs an understanding owner who has the time 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 Ruby 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 Ruby 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!