



Butterscotch 341205: What to Expect

Butterscotch is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Butterscotch is a sweet and sensitive girl who is ready to find her forever home. She may be timid at first, but once she feels safe she enjoys being close by people and playing with toys. Butterscotch may never be a social butterfly with everyone she meets, but she will bond with someone when given the time she needs to get to know you.

Butterscotch came to OHS from the home of an overwhelmed cat caregiver and we do not have much history on her. When Butterscotch arrived at OHS she displayed fearful, shy behavior that would present itself as hissing, swatting and attempting to bite if we got too close to her. After 2 weeks with no change in her 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, increased enrichment, and one on one time with the team we set out to learn more about her.

Butterscotch was nervous for the first few weeks in BMOD and spent most of her time hiding in her bed and watching us with wide eyes. In the beginning, she would cower and hide 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. As she started to understand we were not a threat her body language relaxed and she began to eat the treats that we offered in our presence. She also showed an interest in toys, and as we soared the wand toy though the air, she chased and pounced on it with great delight. By using toys and treats (two things Butterscotch loves) it helped her to understand that only good things happen when people are around. She struggled with hands approaching to pet her and would back away, so we made the decision to introduce 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 and allowed us to gently touch her chin and cheek area for a few seconds before backing away. We paired each “touch” interaction with treats and soon she was leaning into the touch from the back scratcher.

Butterscotch has shown tremendous progress here and we know that in the right home she will flourish even more. She continues to struggle with hands approaching, but several staff that have befriended her have been able to pet her. Her new family should expect it will take time. Butterscotch still has moments when she startles easily and may run and hide but recovers quickly with verbal encouragement.

Butterscotch loves being around other cats. Having a cat friend helps her feel safe and secure. She is often seen playing and snuggling with the other kitties in the program. Butterscotch will do best in a calm home, with a family that is patient with her as she acclimates. She will also need a kitty friend to snuggle and play with.

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. Butterscotch typically flees, hisses and swats when overwhelmed or scared. 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. 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 Butterscotch 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 wet food or a treat on a spoon and offer it to Butterscotch while in her hidey spot. Over

time, by continuing to do this, Butterscotch will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

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

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

Spend time with Butterscotch 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 toy or treats. 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 Butterscotch is worried about, allow her to hang back or hide if she chooses to do so.

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

