



Abby 344843: What to Expect

Abby is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Abby 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, being pet and playing with toys. Abby 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.

Abby was surrendered to OHS by her previous owner who, despite being unable to continue caring for her, had nothing but wonderful things to say about her. Her previous owner said she is very sweet, loves to cuddle, and that she has positive experience living with other kitties and even with other dogs in the home. When Abby 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 3 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 dedicated one-on-one time with the team, we set out to learn more about her.

Abby entered the BMOD program and quickly showed confidence with the staff along with a wand toy prowess and strong aptitude for socializing with the other kitties in the program. We saw immediately that being in a quiet, calm environment and having choice and control made her feel safe. She was nervous at first with new people and with hands approaching, but as we sat with her in her larger kennel and offered her verbal encouragement and treats, she soon realized that we were not a threat and her body language began to relax. Abby began to readily eat the treats we offered her in our presence, and she began to show an avid interest in toys. When we waved the wand toy through the air, we watched her expertly stalk it before catapulting spectacularly high and impressing us with her acrobatic skills. By using toys and treats (two things Abby loves) it helped her to understand that only good things happen when people are around. As her trust in us grew more she became increasingly receptive to touch. When comfortable with people, she enjoys cheek and chin scratches but her new family should expect it will take some time.

Abby also loves being around other cats. She has made many cat friends here in BMOD and having a cat friend helps her feel safe and secure. She is often seen playing and snuggling with the other kitties in the program. Only a few hours after arriving in BMOD, we made the decision to move her into our Sunroom, a communal cat space where she could socialize with other kitties and feel more at ease.

While she is confident in this environment and adapted quickly, she still has moments when she startles easily and may run and hide but recovers quickly with verbal encouragement. Abby 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. She has shown tremendous progress here in short amount of time and we know that in the right home she will flourish even more.

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. Abby 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 Abby 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 Abby while in her hidey spot. Over time, by

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

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

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

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

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