



Hot Fudge 341199: What to Expect

Hot Fudge is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Hot Fudge is a shy and sensitive girl who is ready to find her forever home. Hot Fudge would thrive with a patient, experienced owner who understands feline body language and is willing to give her the time and space she needs to adjust at her own pace. Hot Fudge 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.

Hot Fudge came to OHS from the home of an overwhelmed cat caregiver, and we do not have much history on her. When Hot Fudge arrived at OHS she was about 6 months old and displayed fearful, shy behavior that would present itself as hissing, swatting and attempting to bite if we got too close to her. For cats, there is a critical window of socialization with people, typically between the ages of 2-9 weeks of age. We understood that Hot Fudge may not have been properly socialized with people in her previous home when she arrived at OHS.

Due to her fearful 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.

Over the last few months, we have worked with Hot Fudge to build a relationship with her. She is nervous with fast or loud movements but responds well to verbal encouragement and slow movements. In the beginning, she did not want anyone to come near her. She would hiss, swat and run away if we got too close. We would sit close by her offering words of encouragement and treats to let her know we were not a threat. It wasn't until she had an opportunity to socialize with other cats in the BMOD program that we saw a change in her behavior. When she is around other cats, she is curious, playful with them, and loves to snuggle with them. Seeing how much she enjoyed the company of other cats, we moved her into the Sunroom—a communal cat space where she can socialize and feel more at ease. In this room, we used her interest in other cats to our advantage. As other cats would play with us, Hot Fudge would watch with curiosity and interest. Hot Fudge started to understand that if the other cats thought we were okay, then maybe we weren't so bad. Her body language began to relax in our presence, and she began taking treats from us, enjoying tasty Churu squeeze-ups and crunchy snacks we tossed her way. As her positive association with people grew, she started to have fun playing with wand toys we waved through the air for her. Hot Fudge loves her wand toys, but her favorite pastime is finding a cozy spot by a window to bask in the sun and watch birds flutter outside. Now she has come to enjoy visits from staff, eagerly looking forward to the company, and the toys and treats they bring.

Although Hot Fudge was more comfortable in our presence, she continued to struggle with hands approaching to pet her and would hiss or swat, 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 but then back away. If we continued to move the touch tool closer, she had the potential to hiss, swat, or run away. Her new family should expect to continue working with her on this, by building positive association with toys and treats.

Hot Fudge has been in our care for several months now, and while she has made progress, she will need ongoing support in her new home. She continues to struggle with being touched and will need someone who is dedicated and patient with her. We have tried our best to make her current situation less scary and at this point we feel a home environment rather than a shelter environment will only help her thrive more. Hot Fudge loves other cats and will need to live with another cat, one that is preferably pro-social with people so that she can learn from them.

She will need an experienced owner, someone that is familiar working with shy/fearful cats and that has the time and patience to help her acclimate. If you are looking for a cuddly kitty that loves being pet, then Hot Fudge is not the one for you. She will do best in a calm, quiet home with someone that is experienced in feline body language.

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

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

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

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