



Joyce 343595: What to Expect

Joyce is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Joyce 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 staying close to and observing her people, leaning into gentle pets, eating tasty treats, and sunbathing in her window-side cat tower. Joyce may never be a social butterfly, especially around new people, but with patience and time, she will build a deep and loving bond with someone she learns to trust.

Joyce came to OHS from the home of an overwhelmed cat caregiver, and we do not have much history on her. When Joyce first arrived at OHS, she exhibited fearful and shy behavior, often hissing, swatting, and attempting to bite when approached by staff. After two weeks with no improvement, the decision was made to bring her into our Behavior Modification Program. This program offers an environment better suited to helping cats feel at ease in a shelter setting. With a larger kennel space, access to windows, a quieter atmosphere, and more one-on-one time with staff, we were able to begin to get a better understanding of her needs and personality.

Joyce was nervous for the first several weeks in the Behavior Modification program and spent most of her time hiding on her cat tower and watching us with wide eyes. In the beginning she would hiss, cower, and hide when we approached, but we understood this was her way of communicating that she was scared. To help her build confidence and trust, the team focused on a calm, consistent presence—speaking softly to her and simply sitting nearby so she could become comfortable with us at her own pace and pairing these interactions with tasty treats. It didn't take long to discover that Churus are her absolute favorite!

As Joyce began to realize we weren't a threat, her body language slowly softened. She started eating treats comfortably in our presence and even began to show interest in a feather wand toy we waved for her, batting at it delicately. She was still hesitant about hands reaching towards her and would back away when we tried to pet her. To help her feel more comfortable, we introduced 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. When we gently offered it, she leaned forward to sniff and allowed us to softly scratch her chin and cheeks for a few seconds. We paired each "touch" interaction with treats and before long she began leaning into the touch sensation from the back scratcher. Gradually, we transitioned from the tool to using our hands, and now she happily leans into full-body pets from her friends.

Joyce also started showing interest in the other cats. As we waved a wand toy for the other kitties in the program, Joyce would peek out from her hiding spot and watch with curiosity. We began encouraging our more confident cats to interact near her, and it became clear that their presence helped her relax and sparked a sense of joy. Even as her confidence grew, she was still too shy to approach us on her own. We made the decision to move her into our Sunroom, a communal space where multiple cats live together, hoping that their presence would provide the reassurance she needed to build more trust. She immediately felt more at ease, becoming more curious with her surroundings and intently watching birds and small critters from her window-side cat tower. As she has grown more comfortable, she has shown us that she is a laid-back kitty who prefers relaxing, observing, and napping in her favorite spots. Joyce clearly enjoys the company of other cats—having feline companions helps her feel safe and secure, and she is often found snuggling with her friends.

Joyce 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 be patient with her and understand that it may take some time. Joyce still has moments when she startles easily and may run to hide, but she recovers quickly with gentle verbal reassurance. Joyce will do best in a calm home, with a family that is patient with her as she acclimates. She will also need a calm 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. Joyce typically flees, hisses and hides 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 Joyce 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 Joyce while in her hidey spot. Over time, by continuing to do this, Joyce will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

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

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

Provide Joyce 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.). Instead, provide her with a safe, comfortable hiding place like her cat carrier, a hidey-bed, or a large dog crate covered with a blanket.

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

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