



Whiskers 348886: What to Expect

Whiskers is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Whiskers is a sweet, sensitive, and beautiful girl who is ready to find her forever home. She may be timid at first, but once she feels safe, she loves being pet, eating yummy treats, soaking up sunshine sprawled out on her window perch, and playing with toys. Whiskers may never be a social butterfly with everyone she meets, but with patience and time to build trust, she will form a strong, loving bond with her person.

Whiskers came to OHS from the home of an overwhelmed cat caregiver and we do not have much history on her. When Whiskers arrived at OHS she displayed fearful, shy behavior that would present itself as cowering, hissing, and swatting if we got too close to her. Because of the high stress she was experiencing, 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 our team, we were able to help her decompress and learn more about her personality.

Whiskers was nervous for the first week in BMOD and spent most of her time hiding on her cat tower, quietly watching us with wide, cautious eyes. We started speaking softly to her and offering her treats—crunchy treats are her absolute favorite—and before long, her body language began to relax and she started eating the treats in our presence. She struggled with hands approaching to pet her and would back away with wide eyes, 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. She enjoyed the touch so much that she started accepting pets from our hands and now regularly looks forward to petting sessions with the staff.

Whiskers quickly showed an interest in the other cats in the BMOD program, so we arranged several introductions. As each cat approached to greet her, she immediately perked up, responding with cheerful chirps and soft murmurs. She clearly enjoys feline companionship and can often be found following her new friends around, curling up beside them, or sharing a cozy snuggle. Whiskers also loves spending time on her favorite window perch, where she can sunbathe and watch the wildlife and world outside. Whiskers still has moments when she startles easily and may run and hide, but she recovers quickly with verbal encouragement. She has shown tremendous progress here and we know that in the right home she will flourish even more. Whiskers 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. If you are looking for the sweetest little girl, Whiskers is the kitty for you!

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

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

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

Continue to provide a safe space. Even when Whiskers 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 Whiskers time to adjust to your house, routine, and lifestyle before introducing her to new people. When you have visitors over, give Whiskers the freedom to make the decision to interact (or not!). Ask new people to ignore her – or if Whiskers 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 Whiskers 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 Whiskers 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. Whiskers 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 Whiskers 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 the BMOD Cat trainers at bmodcat@oregonhumane.org to connect with the Feline Behavior Modification department.

Please keep in touch so we can continue to help you and Whiskers 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!