



Nebula 347761: What to Expect

Nebula is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Nebula is a shy and sensitive girl -with the cutest little lightning bolt, corkscrew tail- who is ready to find her forever home. Nebula 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. She may be timid at first, but once she feels safe, her sweet personality shines— savoring tasty Churu treats, sunbathing on her perch by the window, and happily playing with her favorite toys. Nebula 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.

Nebula came to OHS from the home of an overwhelmed cat caregiver, and we don't have much history on her. When Nebula arrived at OHS she displayed fearful, defensive behavior that would present itself as hissing, swatting, lunging, and attempting to bite 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.

Nebula was nervous for the first few weeks in the BMOD program and spent most of her time watching us with wide eyes from her cat tower. In the beginning she would hiss, lunge, and swat 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! Nebula 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 Nebula loves) it helped her to understand that only good things happen when people are around.

Nebula adores her wand toys, but her favorite activity is curling up in a sunny window spot, where she can bask in the sunshine and watch birds flutter by outside. Over time, she has also grown to love visits from staff, eagerly anticipating the attention, treats, and playtime they bring. Nebula also loves being around other cats. She has made many feline 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. Because of this 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.

Although Nebula 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 a positive association with toys and treats.

Nebula enjoys the company of other cats and will need to live with another calm cat, preferably one that is not overly exuberant and is 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 Nebula 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 be prepared for the possibility that she may hide for a few weeks, or even longer, as she adjusts to her new environment. During this time, it's important to introduce her to new experiences slowly and at her own pace. Nebula may hiss, swat, or retreat when she feels overwhelmed or scared, so creating a safe, calm space for her is essential. Set her up in a small, quiet room where she can relax and feel secure, with appropriate hiding spots such as a covered bed or enclosed hideaway. At the same time, avoid hiding places that are completely inaccessible, like tight spaces under heavy furniture, as these can make it difficult to build trust and bond with her. The setup of her initial room will play a major role in how quickly she begins to acclimate. Consider carefully which room in your home would be best. If it's a bedroom, think about whether she could get under the bed or dresser in a way that limits interaction. If it's a bathroom or laundry room, consider whether frequent noise and traffic might be overwhelming for her. Choose a space that is quiet, low-traffic, and allows you to interact with her in a gentle, consistent way. This will help her feel safe while still giving you opportunities to build trust. While she is in her hiding spot, use a calm voice and offer positive reinforcement through treats. You can place a small amount of wet food or a treat on a spoon and offer it near her safe space. Over time, repeated gentle interactions like this can help her learn that people are associated with positive experiences, such as food and safety, which will gradually build her confidence and trust.

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

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

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