



Clarabelle 309548: What to Expect

Clarabelle is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Clarabelle 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 lounging on her window-side cat tower. Clarabelle 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.

Clarabelle was surrendered to OHS due to ongoing conflicts with the resident cat, dog, and children in the home. Her previous family described her as an independent cat who enjoyed lounging and playing by herself and was affectionate towards the adult members of the household. In her previous home, Clarabelle would hiss, swat, and run away when the resident cat approached her for social interaction. On one occasion, while the owners were away, the cats were involved in a physical altercation that resulted in the resident cat sustaining puncture wounds to the neck from a bite. The wounds later became abscessed and required veterinary treatment. When the resident dog attempted to engage her in play, Clarabelle would typically hiss and run away. Her previous family also reported that she did not enjoy interacting with the children in the home and generally avoided them.

Upon returning to OHS, Clarabelle continued to exhibit shy and fearful behavior around people and in response to loud noises. These behaviors included darting away, cowering, and hiding when staff attempted to approach or handle her. Due to the level of stress she was displaying and the impact it had on her ability to comfortably interact with staff, she was enrolled 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.

Clarabelle was nervous for the first week in the BMOD program and spent most of her time up on a high perch or 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 Clarabelle 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. She enjoyed the gentle touch so much that she gradually began accepting pets from our hands. Now, she regularly seeks out affection and eagerly looks forward to snuggle sessions with the staff. She loves having staff visit so much now that she happily greets us by perking up, giving a big stretch, and jumping down from her perch to climb into our laps for cuddle time.

Clarabelle has shown tremendous progress here, and we know that in the right home she will flourish even more. Clarabelle still has moments when she startles easily and may run to hide, but she recovers quickly with gentle verbal reassurance. Clarabelle will thrive in a calm, quiet home with a patient family that will give her the time and space she needs to settle in at her own pace. She is looking for a home where she can be the only pet and would do best in an adult-only household. If you are looking for a sweet, gentle companion with incredibly soft fur, that enjoys her own space while also appreciating quiet moments curled in your lap, then Clarabelle is the girl 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. Clarabelle 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 Clarabelle 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 Clarabelle while in her hidey spot. Over time, by continuing to do this, Clarabelle will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

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

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

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