



Trail 351124: What to Expect

Trail is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Trail is a sweet and playful girl who is ready to find her forever home. Trail may be a little timid at first, but once she feels safe and secure, her charming, playful personality shines through. She loves enjoying tasty treats, zooming around the room, curling up in the sunshine on her window-side cat tower, and playing with her favorite toys. While Trail may never be a social butterfly with everyone she meets, with patience and time to build trust, she'll form a deep bond with her special person and become a fun-loving, energetic companion.

Trail came to OHS from the home of an overwhelmed cat caregiver that was unable to provide proper care for her. When Trail arrived at OHS, she displayed fearful, shy behaviors that presented as hiding, cowering, darting, and hissing when the staff attempted to engage with 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.

Trail was understandably worried and overwhelmed during her first few days in BMOD. She spent much of her time on her cat tower watching us with wide eyes. Whenever staff tried to engage with her, she would cower or quickly retreat to find a safe place. We respected her boundaries, spoke to her softly, and offered treats to help her begin forming positive associations with people. We also introduced toys to see if play could help her come out of her shell—and it worked! The moment we brought out a wand toy, Trail transformed into an agile little hunter. She expertly stalked her “prey,” pouncing with incredible enthusiasm and clearly having a wonderful time.

Trail also had an opportunity to see other cats in the BMOD program and we noticed she showed curiosity and interest in meeting them. We allowed her to have playdates with the other kitties and this is when we saw her confidence grow even more. She was cautious when first coming face to face with them and would hiss, but soon she realized they were fun to be around and was regularly coming out of her kennel to explore and engage with them. She enjoyed the company of other cats so much she was moved into the Sunroom, which is a communal cat room where she can live with other cats 24/7.

As she settled into the routine and structured environment of BMOD, she began to thrive. With the help of toys, treats, and her feline friends, she gradually became more comfortable around people. She began spending more time near us and seeking us out for comfort, play, and positive interactions. However, she remained nervous about being petted and would still back away when we attempted to touch her.

Because she was nervous when hands approached her, we decided to introduce a touch tool—an object that serves as an extension of a person's hand. In her case, we used a back scratcher. We began by simply offering the back scratcher and allowing her to approach and sniff it on her own. Each brave interaction was rewarded with treats, helping her build

a positive association with the experience. Trail has made progress and she now allows us to gently touch her cheek and chin with the touch tool for short periods before backing away, letting us know she's still unsure and needs a little space. We always pair each touch with treats to keep the experience positive and build her confidence around human interaction. And she really loves her treats! Churus are her absolute favorite, and she has become so comfortable that she will even lick them right off our fingers—a sweet little sign that she is learning to trust us.

Trail has blossomed into the playful, sweet, and happy little girl we always knew she could be. She has learned that when people are nearby, it means treats, toys, and plenty of fun. Today, she loves racing through crinkly tunnels, pouncing on wand toys, and playing with just about every toy we offer her. She's even often spotted happily entertaining herself with her favorite toys and playing with the other cats. While she can still be startled by sudden movements or unfamiliar situations and may briefly run to hide, she recovers quickly with gentle reassurance and kind words. She has made tremendous progress during her time in the BMOD program, and we're confident she will continue to flourish in the right home. She will do best in a calm, quiet home with a family that can be patient with her as she acclimates to her new home. She will also need to have a cat friend in her new home, one that can help show her that people are not something to be scared of.

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. Trail typically flees 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 Trail 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 Trail while in her hidey spot. Or bring a toy out and engage in play with her. Over time, by continuing to do this, Trail will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food/toys = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

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

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

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

her – or if Trail 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 Trail 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 Trail 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. Trail 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 Trail to be successful in their 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 Trail 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!