Nolan 356404*:* What to Expect

Nolan is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Nolan is a sweet and sensitive boy who is ready to find his forever home. Nolan may be a little unsure at first, but once he feels safe and secure, his charming personality shines through. He loves spending time lounging on his cat tower, gazing out the window, snacking on treats and playing with toys. While Nolan may never be a social butterfly with everyone he meets, with patience and time to build trust, he'll form a deep bond with his special person and blossom into an affectionate and fun-loving companion.

Nolan came to OH because his previous home had more animals than his owner was able to adequately care for. When he arrived, he exhibited fearful behaviors that were presented as hiding, hissing and swatting whenever staff attempted to engage with him. On several occasions, Nolan swatted at and scratched staff members when they attempted to clean his kennel. In one instance, while crouched in the back of his kennel and displaying signs of extreme fear, Nolan bit a staff member's hand when they attempted to touch him. The bite was a quick bite and release and did not require medical attention. These incidents appeared to be clear indicators that Nolan was feeling overwhelmed by the shelter environment and threatened when approached in his confined space. Feeling cornered and fearful, he responded defensively to protect himself. Due to the level of stress he was displaying and the impact it had on his ability to comfortably interact with staff, he 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 him decompress and learn more about his personality.

Nolan settled into his new kennel in the BMOD program almost immediately. He was soon exploring his larger kennel, investigating the toys we had provided, and gazing out the window at the wildlife. Although he appeared relaxed in his new environment, we were careful to give him space and respect his boundaries as he took the time to become familiar with us.

When staff entered his kennel to provide care, Nolan would often rub against our legs and lean into us. While this behavior is commonly interpreted as a sign of affection, for Nolan, it was also a way to gather information about us and determine whether we were friends or foes. Rather than immediately reaching down to pet him, we allowed him to rub against us without adding the pressure of unwanted touch.

Over the next few weeks, as Nolan grew more comfortable with our presence, we gradually began offering our hands for him to investigate and introduced gentle cheek and chin scratches. In the early stages, he would occasionally swat if petting continued for too long, seemingly communicating, "I don't know you well enough yet." We listened to those signals and continued to let Nolan set the pace, allowing trust to develop on his terms.

We made playtime an important part of Nolan's daily routine. Whenever we sent the wand toy soaring through the air, he delighted in stalking, chasing, and pouncing on it. Nolan also loved every treat we offered and quickly learned to recognize the sound of a treat bag opening. He was always the first to remind us that he hadn't received any treats yet, even when he had already enjoyed a few!

We also gave Nolan opportunities to explore the larger space outside his kennel. As he confidently investigated his surroundings, we would quietly work on the computer nearby, allowing him to become comfortable with our presence without placing any expectations on him. Once he had finished exploring, he would often settle down calmly beside us while we continued working. These quiet moments were another wonderful sign of Nolan's growing comfort and trust in our company.

Because Nolan had a positive history of living with other cats in his previous home, we provided him with supervised opportunities to socialize with other kitties in the program. He was initially a bit cautious but would approach to sniff and say hello before moving on. He seemed comfortable sharing space with other cats, provided they respected his personal boundaries and gave him room. It's difficult to say whether Nolan truly needs a feline companion to be happy. We believe he could do well as the only cat in his new home or potentially share his space with another calm, easygoing kitty who is respectful of his boundaries and comfortable giving him space when needed.

Over the past few weeks in the BMOD program, Nolan has had time to decompress, observe his surroundings, and gradually get to know the staff. As he has become more comfortable, we've seen a wonderful change in his behavior and confidence. He now regularly meows to ask for attention (or treats!), eagerly comes out of his kennel when invited to play with the wand toy, and rubs against our legs as a sign of growing affection and trust. Nolan now accepts and genuinely enjoys pets from the staff members he has bonded with. His defensive swatting has also become much less frequent as he learns that we are his friends and that he can feel safe in our care.

Nolan would thrive in a calm, quiet home with someone who understands the importance of giving him time and patience to adjust to his new surroundings. He needs the opportunity to feel safe, build trust, and develop friendships at his own pace, without feeling pressured into physical affection. If you are willing to give him that time and respect his boundaries, you will be rewarded with a sweet, loving companion.

Nolan may enjoy having another feline friend in his new home, provided introductions are slow and gradual and his new friend is respectful of his space. However, he would also be perfectly happy as the only kitty, soaking up all the love and attention once he has settled in.

His new family should expect that he will hide for a few weeks, possibly longer. You'll need to introduce him to new things slowly. Nolan typically hisses and swats when overwhelmed or scared. It's important to provide him with a small room with appropriate hiding spots for him to relax in, such as his 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 him. The room you set him up in will be the catalyst for how quickly he acclimates. Start thinking now which room in your home would be best for Nolan to settle into. If it's a bedroom, can he get under the bed or dresser making it difficult to spend time with him? 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 him? 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 his 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 Nolan while in his hidey spot. Over time, by continuing to do this, Nolan will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

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

This step is crucial in helping Nolan acclimate to his new home. Confine Nolan to one cat-proof room in your house. Provide Nolan with a litter box, food, water, and a bed. Ensure he cannot get to ***inappropriate*** hiding spots (under the bed, in a closet, on top of a cabinet, etc.). Provide him with a safe, comfortable hiding place instead like his cat carrier, a hidey-bed, or a large dog crate covered with a blanket.

Spend time with Nolan in his room. Don't force him out of his hiding spot. Instead, encourage him to come out on his own using happy talk, offering a toy or treats. Once he is using the litter box, eating regularly, and coming out of hiding to interact with you, you can start introducing him to the rest of your home. Start by propping the door open and allowing him to come out on his own. Don't force it! If you come across something that you can tell Nolan is worried about, allow him to hang back or hide if he chooses to do so.

Continue to provide a safe space. Even when Nolan has started exploring the rest of the house, give him a safe space that he can retreat to. When he is in his safe space, insist that guests leave him alone and try to ignore him yourself. That way, when he comes out, you can reward his bravery with your attention.

No visitors (at first). Allow Nolan time to adjust to your house, routine, and lifestyle before introducing him to new people. When you have visitors over, give Nolan the freedom to make the decision to interact (or not!). Ask new people to ignore him – or if Nolan seems curious or interested, have the new person toss his treats or offer a favorite toy. We want exciting, good things to come from new people.

Practice crate training. Leave his carrier out all the time, so it's just a part of his normal environment. Add a bed and keep the door securely propped open so he can go in and out on his own, making sure the door won't swing shut and frighten him. You can also clicker train his to run into the carrier on cue. Helping Nolan get comfortable with his carrier will make it easier when it's time to visit the vet.

Visiting the vet: Unless it's an emergency, give Nolan time to bond to you before taking him to the vet. Vet visits will more than likely be scary, but if he already trusts you, your presence may help him feel more comfortable.

Patience will come in handy for you. Nolan is a cat that needs an understanding owner who has the time and desire to allow him to adapt in his own time. He may never be a social butterfly, and that's okay! Getting to know him and watching him come out of his hell will be extremely rewarding. Celebrate those small victories.

We're here to help!
We want Nolan 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 Nolan 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!