



Mya 292250: What to Expect

Mya is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Mya is a shy, sweet girl who is ready to find her forever home. Mya needs an understanding owner that is experienced with feline body language and has the time and desire to allow her to acclimate in her own time. Mya may never be a social butterfly with everyone she meets, but she will bond with her new family when given the time she needs to acclimate.

Mya was originally surrendered to the OHS Salem campus due to her former family having too many animals. While at the Salem campus, Mya was avoidant of being handled by the staff – backing away, hissing, swatting, and darting from people. The staff worked with her for several weeks trying to build confidence and trust, but Mya continued to display fearful behavior. It was then decided to place her in the Behavior Modification program at the Portland campus to allow time for her to acclimate and work with her on her fearful behavior.

We found early on that Mya responded well to verbal encouragement. Sitting near her, speaking softly, and offering slow eye blinks gave Mya the confidence needed to trust us. Overtime, as her confidence and trust grew even more, she stopped hiding from people and would regularly come out of her hiding to engage with people. We would offer our hand to Mya for her to smell and rub on first. After this initial greeting she would allow you to pet her. Once she feels comfortable with someone, she loves to lean in for cheek/chin scratches, allows full body pets and will headbutt to show her affection. Mya continues to be worried when loud and/or sudden movements occur. In these moments she will run and hide but easily recovers with gentle calming voices. Once a bond and relationship are formed with people, she will lean in for pets and headbutt to show her affection. Her favorite activities are playing with toys, eating treats, and relaxing in the best sunspots. She has been exposed to other cats here and seems to really like them. Other cats have been crucial in helping her build confidence. Mya will need to find a home where there is another cat for her to have as a friend.

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. Mya typically flees and hides when overwhelmed or scared. If cornered, she will hiss, cower, and swat so it's important to not overwhelm her as she adjusts to her new home. 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. **She should not be given access to the whole home setting until she has acclimated to one room. 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 Mya 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 a wet food or a treat on a spoon and offer it to Mya while in her hidey spot. Or toss her a few crunchy treats. Bring the laser pointer or wand toy out and allow her to observe and engage with it. Over time, by continuing to do this, Mya will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food/playtime = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

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

This step is crucial in helping Mya acclimate to her new home. Confine Mya to one cat-proof room in your house. Provide Mya 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.). Provide her with a safe, comfortable hiding place instead like her cat carrier, a hidey-bed, or a large dog crate covered with a blanket.

Spend time with Mya 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 Touch Tool, treats or toys. 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 Mya is worried about, allow her to hang back or hide if she chooses to do so.

Continue to provide a safe space. Even when Mya 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 Mya time to adjust to your house, routine, and lifestyle before introducing her to new people. When you have visitors over, give Mya the freedom to make the decision to interact (or not!). Ask new people to ignore her – or if Mya 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 Mya 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 Mya 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. Mya 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 Mya 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 Erika at erikas@oregonhumane.org to connect with the Feline Services Manager.

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