



Romeo 290143: What to Expect

Romeo is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Romeo is a shy, sensitive, sweet boy who is ready to find his forever home. Romeo needs an understanding owner that is experienced with feline body language and has the time and desire to allow him to acclimate in his own time. Romeo may never be a social butterfly with everyone he meets, but he will bond with someone when given the time he needs to get to know you.

Romeo was surrendered to the OHS Salem campus in April of 2023 due to a death in the family. His previous owners described him as being sweet, anxious with change and needing a lot of patience. While in the shelter environment, Romeo displayed fearful, shy behavior and was avoidant of being pet. He was adopted out in May of 2023 but returned after a month due to the adopter not being prepared to take on such a shy kitty. It was then decided to move him to the OHS Portland campus where we could work with him in the Behavior Modification program.

When he first arrived in the Behavior Modification program Romeo would continuously hide and cower in his hidey bed. We worked on building trust and confidence by talking to him calmly, even singing to him and getting him used to our presence. Over several months, Romeo stopped hiding and now regularly perches on his scratching post observing the daily activities around him. Romeo continues to be fearful of being touched with hands, so we used a touch tool to introduce ourselves. A touch tool could be anything from a paint brush, the end of a wand toy or a back scratcher. We would introduce the tool and allow him to sniff it. We would then gently rub his cheek/chin area and when Romeo is in a relaxed state he would lean in, relax his body, and close his eyes. We would then reward this interaction by offering him freeze dried treats which are his favorite. On some occasions, when he wasn't in the mood of being touched, he would back away and swat. Romeo is still working on being touched with hands and will need an experienced, calm, and patient person to help him with his progress. Romeo may never be the snuggly, cuddly kitty that we all want him to be, but he does enjoy being around people. He's happy to observe the world around him, being close by people but isn't overly affectionate or needy.

Romeo does have a bite history when he bit an individual that was petting him. At first, Romeo's body language suggested he was enjoying being pet but he quickly became overwhelmed to the touch and in response he bit their finger. It was a minor bite, and no medical attention was needed, but its important for potential adopters to understand that he continues to need help with learning that being pet is something not to be afraid of. Romeo is very good at communicating with his body language on when he is comfortable and when he is feeling overwhelmed or scared. His new owners should be well versed in feline body language.

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. Romeo typically flees, hides, and may bite 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. Romeo likes being up high so a cat scratching post that he can lounge in would be great for 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 Romeo 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 a wet food or a treat on a spoon and offer it to Romeo while in his hidey spot. Over time, by continuing to do this, Romeo will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

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

This step is crucial in helping Romeo acclimate to his new home. Confine Romeo to one cat-proof room in your house.

Provide Romeo 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 Romeo 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 Romeo is worried about, allow him to hang back or hide if he chooses to do so.

Continue to provide a safe space. Even when Romeo 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 Romeo time to adjust to your house, routine, and lifestyle before introducing him to new people. When you have visitors over, give Romeo the freedom to make the decision to interact (or not!). Ask new people to ignore him – or if Romeo seems curious or interested, have the new person toss him 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 him to run into the carrier on cue. Helping Romeo 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 Romeo 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. Romeo 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 shell will be extremely rewarding. Celebrate those small victories.

We're here to help!

We want Romeo to be successful in his 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 Romeo 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!

