



Larry 301224: What to Expect

Larry is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Larry is a shy, sensitive, sweet boy who is ready to find his forever home. Larry 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. Larry 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.

Larry came to OHS from an overwhelmed cat caregiver. He spent his whole life in one home so you can imagine how worrisome and overwhelming the shelter environment is for him. When he first arrived, he displayed fearful, shy behavior and was avoidant of being pet. After several weeks with no change in his behavior, he was placed in the Behavior Modification Program. The environment in the BMOD program is more conducive to helping cats feel comfortable in a shelter environment. With the larger kennel space, access to windows, and increased one on one time with the team we set out to learn more about him and help him overcome his fears.

When he first arrived in the Behavior Modification program Larry would continuously hide and cower in his hidey bed. Larry has never shown aggressive behavior towards people, but rather goes into flight or freeze mode when he is scared. We worked on building trust and confidence by talking to him calmly and getting him used to our presence. We would offer him treats and worked on building positive associations with people by not forcing any interactions on him. Overtime we could see his body begin to relax and he would regularly hop off his cat tower throughout the day to eat, drink and use the litterbox. He continued to be fearful of people approaching (would slink back and cower his head) but as we built trust with him, he started tolerating being pet. He then started accepting and enjoying being brushed. Every time we pet him, we would always pair the interaction with treats to continue building positive associations with people. Larry is still working on being confident and comfortable with people and will need an experienced, calm, and patient person to help him with his progress. Larry 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. Larry is very good at communicating with his body language when he is comfortable and when he is feeling overwhelmed or scared. His new owners should be well versed in feline body language. Larry has lived with cats in the past and currently shares a larger space with other cats here. He would do fine with another kitty that is happy to just relax and hang out and not one that wants to rough and tumble play with him.

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. Larry typically flees, hides, and cowers 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. **He should not be given access to the whole home setting until he has acclimated to one room. 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 Larry 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 Larry while in his hidey spot. Or toss him a few crunchy treats. Over time, by continuing to do this, Larry will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

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

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

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

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

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