



Alexandria 306377: What to Expect

Alexandria is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Alexandria is a shy, sweet girl who is ready to find her forever home. Alexandria needs a family that has the time and desire to allow her to acclimate in her own time. Once she feels comfortable and knows she is safe, she is very social, engaging and loves attention. Alexandria will bond with her new family when given the time she needs to acclimate.

Alexandria was transferred from another shelter, and we don't have much history on her. She came in with her three kittens and all were placed in a foster home where Alexandria could finish raising her babies. While in the foster home, she was an excellent mother to her kittens, but did display shy, fearful behavior to the foster parent. The foster parent stated that she would hide and hiss at her whenever she went into the room to provide care but did start to relax and accept limited petting after some time. At one point, Alexandria ran out of the room she was residing in and got into a fight with the resident cat. The foster parent went to separate the cats and during the process of separating them, she bit the foster parents' hand. It was a quick bite and release and no major injuries occurred. Upon her return to OHS, she continued to display fearful behaviors towards people and loud noises. She would display this behavior by being crouched low in the back of her kennel, dilated eyes, and hiding when staff attempted to handle her. The decision was then made to place her 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 more one on one time with the team we set out to learn more about her and help her overcome her fears.

When she first arrived in the Behavior Modification program Alexandria would continuously hide and burrow under her blankets. She responded very well to verbal encouragement and after a few weeks she was leaning in for cheek and chin scratches. She even started taking treats from us and showing an interest in playing with toys. She now regularly meows at us asking for attention and love. She will headbutt and purr showing how much she appreciates us. She also loves sitting in laps so if you're looking for a lap cat then Alexandria is the one for you. What Alexandria needed was a quiet environment and time to build trust and confidence with people and she is now ready to find her forever home.

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. Alexandria typically flees, hides, and cowers 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. **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 Alexandria 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 Alexandria while in her hidey spot. Or toss her a few crunchy treats. Over time, by continuing to do this, Alexandria will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

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

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

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

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