



## Gigi 291544: What to Expect

**Gigi is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home.** Gigi is a shy, sweet girl who is ready to find her forever home. Gigi 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. Gigi 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.

Gigi was originally transferred to OHS from Maui Humane Society in August 2023 due to the wildfires on the island. Her transfer helped to free up space at Lanai Cat Sanctuary which helped meet the communities needs with their personal pets. She had lived her whole life at Lanai cat Sanctuary, so you can imagine how worrisome all the changes she has gone through have been for her. She was quickly adopted out into a home when she first arrived in August 2023. After 10 months in that home, the adopter made the decision to return her as she was too fearful for their lifestyle. Her adopter stated she was very sweet but just too shy for their household. While in the adopter's home, she spent most of her time in a closet and would only come out at night to eat or use the litterbox. After being returned to OHS in June of 2024, she 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 more one on one time with the team we set out to learn more about her and help her overcome her fears.

Gigi's go to defense mechanism when scared is to hide, hiss and put her ears down. As she displayed this behavior towards us, we would ignore it and sit quietly by her. Sitting near her, speaking softly, and offering slow eye blinks gave Gigi a chance to build a positive association with us and to understand we were not a threat. We did not want to force any pets or touch on her, so we spent several weeks just sweet talking to her. Overtime her body would start to relax and her ears would come up. We wanted to find out what brought her joy, and we learned pretty quickly that she likes treats, especially Churus. We used these treats to build a positive association between people and food. As we held the treat in our hands, she would cautiously watch us as she readily ate the treat. Overtime, she started to understand that people = treats and we could see her confidence growing. Even as her body started to relax, she still didn't fully trust us and would hiss if we attempted to pet her. She continued to be hesitant about being touched, so we introduced a touch tool. A touch tool is anything that can be considered an extension of your hand (backscratcher, pen, paint brush, etc.). As we would bring the back scratcher towards her, she would lean in to sniff it. This was a good sign so we would gently move the touch tool along her cheek/chin area, and she started leaning into the touch. Soon, she was leaning in for pets from the touch tool not only from her cheek area but also all along her back and even doing elevator butt. As she continued to enjoy being pet with the touch tool, we worked our way up to using our hands. She now accepts and enjoys being pet with hands, but she needs time to build trust with people first.

Gigi continues to use her original defense mechanism when overwhelmed (hide, hiss, ears down) but we understand now that it's her way of saying "too fast", so we slow down our movements and within a few minutes she's taking treats from us, leaning in for pets and purring. She has shown an interest in the other cats in the program and would watch and chirp at them while in her kennel. We allowed her to have playdates with several other kitties in the program and being around other cats has helped her flourish even more. Because she loves other cats so much, she was moved into the Sunroom which is a communal cat room where she could be around other cats 24/7. Other cats have been crucial in helping her build confidence. Gigi 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. Gigi typically flees, hides and hisses 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 Gigi 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 Gigi 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, Gigi will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food/playtime = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

### **Here's how to help Gigi during your first months together:**

#### **This step is crucial in helping Gigi acclimate to her new home. Confine Gigi to one cat-proof room in your house.**

Provide Gigi 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 Gigi 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 Gigi is worried about, allow her to hang back or hide if she chooses to do so.

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

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