



Sidra 306825: What to Expect

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

Sidra was transferred from another shelter and according to them she had been living outdoors for several years before being brought to their shelter. When she arrived at that shelter, her fur was severely matted, and she had to be shaved. She was soon transferred to OHS and upon arrival she displayed fearful, avoidant behavior with the staff. She would hide, cower and flinch any time we attempted to touch her. Upon further examination it was found she had an oral infection that needed medical treatment. Sidra was diagnosed with stomatitis, also referred to as feline chronic gingivostomatitis. This condition causes severe inflammation of the tissues in the mouth, resulting in a bright red, irritated appearance to the gums, lip edges, soft palate, and the back of the oral cavity. This tissue becomes friable (more delicate) and bleeds easily. Stomatitis is a painful, chronic condition with a largely unknown cause. Cats can be stoic and hide things well from us, but these cats often have difficulty eating, may lose weight, paw at their mouths, or excessively drool. They may appear scruffier than normal, which can occur due to poor nutrition and decreased grooming. Because this inflammation is often caused by an overreaction to the plaque bacteria on teeth, a common way to manage this condition is to extract all (or almost all) of the cat's teeth. This is currently the only solution that seems to provide long-term relief from the pain and inflammation caused. Due to Sidra's behavior and medical concerns, the decision was made to place her in our 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 as well as help her recover from having all her teeth extracted.

Sidra'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 Sidra 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 Temptation treats. Even though she has no teeth, she loves crunchy treats and food. We used these treats to build a positive association between people and food. 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 cower 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, which she was not a fan of. We believe that the years of pain she went through with her oral infection made her very cautious about being touched on her cheeks. We then started using the Touch Tool to pet her back and she loved it and was soon doing elevator butt and leaning into the touch. 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. She is still hesitant about being touched around her mouth but does enjoy all the back and butt scratches you can give her.

Sidra is continuing to recover from having all her teeth extracted and is currently undergoing steroid and antibiotic therapy for her stomatitis. She will need ongoing care to get the inflammation in her mouth under control and will likely need lifelong immunosuppressive medication to keep her comfortable and healthy. Sidra has made amazing progress both behaviorally and medically since arriving at OHS in May and is now ready to find her forever home. Sidra has met several other kitties here and enjoys their company. She may enjoy having a feline friend in her new home, one that is happy to hang out and relax with her and not one that wants to rough and tumble play.

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. Sidra 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 Sidra 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 Sidra 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, Sidra will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food/playtime = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

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

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

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