



Afu 313753: What to Expect

Afu is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Afu is a shy, playful boy who needs time to build trust and confidence with new people. Afu will do best with an owner who has experience owning or caring for shy, fearful cats.

Afu was found living outside as a stray when he was 7 weeks old. When he arrived at OHS, he displayed fearful behavior, crouching low, hiding, hissing, and swatting when staff attempted to engage with him. After several days with no change in his behavior, he joined 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.

Afu spent most of his time hiding when he first came into BMOD. We worked on building trust and confidence by talking to him calmly, offering treats and getting him used to our presence by sitting close by him. He showed an interest in toys, and we would use these toys to build a positive association with people. As we soared the wand toy through the air, he would watch, chase and pounce on it with great delight. We also paired every interaction we had with him with treats. Churus are his favorite, and by offering him the treats he started to understand we were not a threat. Even though he was playing with toys and taking treats when offered, he continued to be weary of touch and would back away or run any time we attempted to pet him. He showed curiosity and interest in the other cats in the BMOD program and that's when we decided to let him have playdates with some of them. We noticed he became more confident and comfortable with his surroundings any chance he had being around other cats. He then moved into our Sunroom, which is a communal room, where he could live with other cats 24/7. While in this room, we watched and observed as he climbed the cat towers to look out the windows, snuggled with the other kitties and pounced on toys with enthusiasm. The team also sat in this room with him, offering wand toys and tasty treats which he readily accepted from us. As his confidence grew, he started coming closer to us and sniffing our fingers. After several attempts, he accepted a few cheek and chin scratches. Afu continues to have moments where he is scared and will run away if we attempt to pet him when he is not ready, but we know that with ongoing patience and time, his fearful behavior will continue to diminish. Afu has made amazing progress in BMOD but will need ongoing support in his new home to help him flourish even more. He will do best in a calm environment, one where there is a resident cat to be his friend.

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. Afu typically flees and hides when overwhelmed or scared. If cornered, he will hiss, cower, and swat so it's important to not overwhelm him as he adjusts to his new home. 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 Afu 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 Afu while in his hidey spot. Or toss him a few crunchy treats. Bring the laser pointer or wand toy out and allow him to observe and engage with it. Over time, by continuing to do this, Afu will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food/playtime = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

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

This step is crucial in helping Afu acclimate to his new home. Confine Afu to one cat-proof room in your house. Provide Afu 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 Afu 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 treats or toys. 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 Afu is worried about, allow him to hang back or hide if he chooses to do so.

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