



## Cheddar 315366: What to Expect

Cheddar is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Cheddar is a sweet, playful boy who needs time to build trust and confidence with new people. Cheddar will bond with his new family when given the time he needs to acclimate.

Cheddar was surrendered to the OHS Salem campus from the home of an overwhelmed cat caregiver. When he arrived, he displayed fearful behavior, crouching low, hiding, hissing, and swatting when staff attempted to engage with him. After 10 days with no change in his behavior, he joined the Behavior Modification Program at the Portland campus. 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.

Cheddar acclimated very quickly to the BMOD program. For the first day we spoke softly to him and left treats in his kennel to let him know we were not a threat. By the second day, he was slow blinking at us with relaxed body language. As we spoke calmly to him, he leaned forward to sniff our finger, that was all it took for him to lean in for cheek and chin scratches. It seems that the shelter environment was too busy and overwhelming for him and all he needed was a calm, slower paced environment to help him feel safe which is what the BMOD program was able to provide for him. He is now very social with people, loves being pet and will purr and purr. He also loves to sit in laps! Cheddar enjoys playing with toys and he has met several other kitties here and does well with them.

Cheddar continues to have moments when he is scared and will run away if there is a loud noise or fast movement, but he recovers quickly with verbal encouragement. He will do best in a calm environment and may enjoy having a feline friend in his new home.

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

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

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

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

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