



Hera 313036: What to Expect

Hera is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Hera is a sweet, playful girl once she gets to know a person, but she will be scared at first. Patience and time are the best things for her as she acclimates to new people and places.

When Hera arrived at the OHS Salem campus she displayed fearful behavior, crouching low, hiding, hissing, and swatting when staff attempted to engage with her. After several days with no change in her behavior, she was transferred to the OHS Portland campus so she could join 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 her and help her overcome his fears.

We worked on building trust and confidence by talking to her calmly, offering treats and getting her used to our presence by sitting close by her. She 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, she would watch, chase and pounce on it with great delight. We also paired every interaction we had with her with treats. Churus are her favorite, and by offering her the treats she started to understand we were not a threat. Even though she was playing with toys and taking treats when offered, she continued to be weary of touch and would back away or run any time we attempted to pet her. She showed curiosity and interest in the other cats in the BMOD program and that's when we decided to let her have playdates with some of them. We noticed she became more confident and comfortable with her surroundings any chance she had being around other cats. She then moved into our Sunroom, which is a communal room, where she could live with other cats 24/7. While in this room, we watched and observed as she 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 her, offering wand toys and tasty treats which she readily accepted from us. As her confidence grew, she started coming closer to us and sniffing our fingers. After several attempts, she accepted a chin scratch and that was all it took for her to lean in and allow full body pets. Hera continues to have moments where she is scared and will run away if we attempt to pet her when she is not ready, but we know that with ongoing patience and time, her fearful behavior will continue to diminish. Hera has made amazing progress but will need ongoing support in her new home to help her flourish even more. She will do best in a calm environment, one where there is a resident cat to be her 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. Hera typically flees and hides 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 Hera 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 Hera 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, Hera will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food/playtime = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

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

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

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