



Cathy 316192: What to Expect

Cathy is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Cathy is a sweet, social 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.

Cathy was transferred to OHS from another shelter and we didn't have much history on her. When she arrived, 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 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 her and help her overcome her 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. In the beginning she would cower and hiss when we got near her, but as we sweet talked to her and moved slow, she started to relax around us. She began displaying relaxed body language and would slow blink at us as if to say she was ok with 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. She is now very accepting of touch and will purr and lean in for attention. She also gives the best headbutts and she loves cuddling and sitting in laps. Cathy continues to have moments where she is scared and may back away, but she recovers quickly with sweet talk and slow movements. Cathy has met several other kitties here and has enjoyed spending time with them. She may enjoy having a feline friend in her new home, one that is happy to just hang out and relax and not one that wants to rough and tumble play with her. She would also do fine as the only cat in her new home. She will do best in a calm environment, with someone that has the patience and time to help her feel comfortable.

Cathy arrived at OHS with a scar on her left eye. Our medical team diagnosed it as a chronic corneal scar likely from sort of trauma she experienced in the past. It does not cause her any pain or irritation, though she does have limited vision in this eye. She is able to navigate her world just fine, though sometimes she will startle if you approach her from this side of her head when she is not expecting you to. At this time, there is no treatment needed for the corneal scar.

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

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

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

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