

AnimalFriends Presents

Solving Litter Box issues

Has your cat started to have accidents outside of her litter box?
Do you want to rip your hair out?
Take a deep breath.

Cats may stop using their litter box for various reasons. The important thing to keep in mind is that most cats prefer to use their boxes. The fact that they have stopped is the clearest indicator that something is going on with your cat.

Perhaps your cat is sending you a message she doesn't feel well, or that the box needs to be cleaned. Have any changes occurred in your home? Cats are very receptive to change, even in their owners' emotions. If any major changes have occurred in the home, or perhaps a move, you may encounter litter box issues.

The following list is a series of steps that you should take to try to resolve litter-box issues.

Remember, never punish your cat! Cats do not respond to any type of aversive training, and frightening your cat could make matters much worse.

1. Consult your vet. Make sure your cat is not suffering from a medical problem. Cats may stop using their box if they have a urinary tract infection because they associate pain with using their box. Excessive peeing outside of the box may also indicate renal disease.
2. One litter box per cat plus one extra is the rule for healthy happy cats and owners. So if you have two cats, you should have three boxes. Five cats = six boxes!
3. Litter boxes should be scooped several times per day. Completely change and clean the box weekly if you are using clay litter, and clean and change it monthly if using scoopable litter.
4. Try changing the type of litter. Consider clay, scoopable, wheat, good news, newspaper, etc.
5. If you are using a covered litter box, try taking the lid off. Covered boxes can confine odors and may also make your cat feel trapped. Cats want to be able to easily "escape" their litter box.
6. Buy a new litter box. The litterbox needs to be changed because odors get in the scratches on the bottom of the box, which cats can smell and find offensive. Consider purchasing a new box every year.
7. Try adding litter boxes to new locations. A current location may be too noisy or otherwise unappealing to your cat. Keep boxes in different rooms and on multiple levels of the home.



8. Isolate the cat in one room until you can figure out the problem. (Understand that isolation, by itself, does not fix the problem. The behavior will start again if you simply let the cat back out.)
9. Place litter boxes in the area where the cat is peeing.
10. Make sure to use a cleaning product designed specifically to pick up cat urine. Cats will continue to pee in the same spot if their scent is there.
11. For more information, consider purchasing Patricia McConnell's booklet *The Fastidious Feline*, which is available at Amazon.com.
12. Check out "Litterbox Problems: How to Prevent and Treat," a class that is frequently offered through Animal Friends University. Visit www.ThinkingOutsideTheCage.org for a current schedule.

Resolving litter-box issues can take time, patience, and a great deal of unconditional love for your kitty. Your efforts, however, will be rewarded!

