

How to Coax Your Cat Back into the Litterbox

CatChannel expert Jeanne Adlon, offers tips for dealing with a cat's inappropriate elimination.

By Jeanne Adlon

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Q: What should I do when my cat stops using the litterbox?

A: To use the litterbox or not to use the litterbox — that is the question I am continually asked. Good litterbox habits are essential to happy households, but when your kitty starts to think outside the box, there can be trouble. There are no guaranteed ways to force a cat back to his litter pan, but I have seen many strange behaviors in my 30 years as a cat sitter and can share some helpful hints with you.

Remember that eliminating outside the litterbox, excessive urination, straining to urinate and discolored urine can be signs of illness. If your kitty exhibits any of these signs, take her to the veterinarian right away. Once you have determined that a medical issue is not the cause of your cat's inappropriate elimination, there are several tips you can use to coax your cat back into the litterbox.

First, cats and cleanliness go hand in paw, so make sure your cat's litterbox is clean. Scoop it out daily and, depending on the litter, change it at least once a week. Make sure you wash the pan. If you have more than one cat, invest in additional litterboxes. The general rule is one litterbox for each cat, plus one extra box.

Be sure to place the litterboxes in convenient places. You would be amazed at where some people keep them. I had one client who kept one on a high rise terrace with no protective railing. I guess she didn't know that cats do not come equipped with parachutes. (The pan moved inside once I politely pointed this out.) Also, a really fussy cat might even like two boxes of its own, one for No. 1 and one for No. 2.

Though cats crave consistency, they suddenly might tire of their favorite litters. If so, try new brands, but always mix a little of the old litter in the pan until you see if it is acceptable to your cat.

If your cat continues to use another part of the house as a bathroom, I suggest temporarily placing an additional box in that exact spot. It might sound inconvenient, but your goal is to retrain your cat to start using the litterbox again — any litterbox. Once your cat starts using the new litterbox, you can start moving it back to where the original litterbox location. At the same time, clean the soiled area thoroughly, and place a food dish there for a few days. As a rule, cats will not go to the bathroom in the same area as their food. Hopefully, once the new litterbox is back next to the old one, the problem will be solved.

Jeanne's Tip of the Week:

A plastic mat under the entrance to the litter pan helps catch the occasional accident and keeps the area cleaner. Keeping a small dust pan and brush nearby also is a good idea. More tips

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