

My Cat Is Missing the Litterbox

CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger, CCBC, discusses issues that could be causing changes in cat's litterbox habits.

By Marilyn Krieger

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Q: We have a 4-year-old female cat who is now defecating on the floor outside the litterbox, though she is urinating in the box. In addition to her, we also have one other cat. They've been together for three years. Both cats are very affectionate to us and each other. There has never been any litterbox problems with either cat. There are three litterboxes which are scooped twice a day. I change the litter and wash out the boxes once a month. We use natural litter made of ground corn cob, we've always used this type. This behavior started about a month ago and has escalated in frequency. There have been no changes in our family or home. This is extremely frustrating to us and would appreciate any help you can provide.

A: There are many different triggers that could be causing your cat not to defecate in her litterbox. You will have to do a little detective work to determine what is triggering this behavior. Before determining this is a behavior challenge, take your cat to the veterinarian. It's important to rule out any medical issues that could be causing this. Parasites, constipation as well as other medical problems can cause cats to sometimes not use their cat boxes.

If your cat has long hair, consider giving her a trim around the hindquarters. Cats don't like the feel of litter and excrement clinging to their fur. Other reasons that could be causing your cat's bathroom challenge can be related to her not feeling safe and secure when she uses the cat box. There may have been a small altercation between her and her cat buddy which slightly changed their relationship.

Additionally, there may be some neighborhood cats hanging out around your house who are causing your cat to feel insecure. Or there may be some territorial challenges between her and her buddy. Another possible reason for the behavior is that the litterbox situation might not be ideal. Though it worked in the past, something has occurred that may have resulted in the current litterbox configuration not being adequate. Without doing a full consultation it's hard for me to identify what the actual triggers are.

Even though we haven't identified the triggers, here are a few additional suggestions that may help the situation: Add one or two cat boxes in other locations in the house. They should be large and uncovered, located in areas where your cat won't feel like she can be trapped or ambushed. Don't change the current cat box configuration; instead add new box/es. Add Feliway diffusers around the house. These plug-ins slightly relieve stress, helping cats feel a little more secure. Use a good enzyme cleaner to thoroughly clean up the area outside the litterbox where she's been defecating.