

One of My Six Cats Stopped Using the Litterbox

CatChannel and CAT FANCY cat behaviorist Marilyn Krieger, CCBC, discusses how to encourage good litterbox habits in a multicat household.

By CAT FANCY and CatChannel cat behaviorist Marilyn Krieger, CCBC

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Q: I have six cats and one of them, 8-year-old female Callie, urinates either beside the litterbox or in the corner, near the litterbox. I don't understand why she always defecates in the box but doesn't urinate in it. I don't think the problem is the litter. We have a two-story home and keep two litter boxes downstairs and two boxes upstairs. Callie has been doing this for some time.

A: Cats with litterbox issues often urinate outside the litterbox, while still choosing to defecate inside the box. Some of the reasons for this behavior are poor litterbox management, not enough litterboxes, covered cat boxes and boxes placed in undesirable locations. Additionally, some cats do not like urinating and defecating in the same box. Medical problems can also cause litterbox avoidance, so have a veterinarian first examine the cat before determining the problem is behavioral.

Based on your e-mail, Callie most likely chooses to urinate on the floor instead of in the litterbox because of an inadequate number of litterboxes and/or their locations and the litterbox type. The basic cat box rule is keep one more litterbox than there are cats in the household. Because you have six cats, ideally you should have seven litterboxes, located in different areas in your house. Put them in places where the cats cannot be ambushed.

Closets, bathrooms and laundry rooms are not good litterbox locations because cats can feel trapped. Good litterbox locations are places where the cats have great views. A good view of the room and out the door lets cats identify potential threats and gives them time to escape.

The litterbox type also influences cat litterbox habits. Covered boxes are problematic because they retain odors. Additionally, because they have only one way in and out, cats can feel trapped in covered litterboxes. Litterboxes also need to be large. Instead of buying commercial litterboxes, consider using clear 66-quart storage containers as litterboxes. The tall walls keep more litter in the box and the clear walls let cats see through them.

Cats often will avoid using their litterboxes because they are dirty. Litterboxes need to be scooped at least once a day and dumped of all litter, washed with hot water and then refilled with fresh litter on a regular basis.