



# Thinking *Inside* the Box

There are many reasons for a cat's inappropriate elimination, and you will need to uncover the issue(s) he might be having in order to solve it. Here are some things to consider...

## **Medical Issues**

First and foremost, you must eliminate the possibility that your kitty might have a medical issue before you attempt to remedy the situation behaviorally. If you bypass the possibility of a medical diagnosis, you will not only waste time in searching for a behavior solution that ultimately won't work but your cat's medical issue will have gone untreated for that much longer. So regardless of how certain you might feel that the cause is not medical, it is imperative that you rule out a medical issue before attempting a behavior solution.

## **Cleanliness**

Cats are fastidious creatures, so it goes without saying that they don't appreciate having to use a dirty potty. If your cat deems the litter box to be too dirty for his liking, he may look elsewhere for a cleaner alternative. A litter box should be scooped twice daily and completely emptied once a week, at which time the box should be cleaned out with soap and water before being refilled with fresh litter.

## **Type of Litter**

Cats can have a preference to the type of litter that they use. While some cats like clumping (scoopable) litter, others prefer traditional non-clumping litter. Some cats don't like litter that has a fragrance or perfume or they may not like plastic litter box liners, which can get stuck on claws or make scary noises. Should inappropriate elimination arise, fill one litter box with his original litter and add a second box with a different type. If this restores his appropriate potty habits, you can then transition him back to one box with the new litter. If, after transition back to a single box, the inappropriate elimination resumes, he may just prefer having two boxes.

## **Number of Litterboxes**

If you have multiple cats, you may not know exactly who is having the issue, but adding more boxes is a good place to start. A good rule of thumb is to have one box per cat plus one extra. Litter boxes that are cleaned daily can still get dirty quickly with multiple cats sharing them. And some cats simply don't like to share with others, or they don't like pooping and peeing in the same box!

## **Location**

Cats enjoy their privacy when they "go". A litterbox should be placed in a low-traffic area of your home but not so out-of-the-way that the cat has to travel too far to get to it. Further, a litterbox should not be near a household appliance that makes sudden or loud noises, like a washer/dryer. And in a multi-pet

household (cats and/or dogs), litterboxes should be located in several areas of the house in case another animal is an impassable obstacle to a particular location.

### **Size and Type of Litterbox**

The bigger the cat, the bigger the litter box needs to be. No cat likes to have to scrunch up to fit in his potty. Finding poops just outside the box or on the edge can be a sign that the box is too small.

Having a covered litterbox can also cramp your kitty's style. It's a cat's instinct to eliminate in an open area so that he can see predators approaching. A covered litterbox impedes his view and can make him feel vulnerable, so try removing the cover from his litterbox to see if that solves the problem.

### **Reaction to Change**

Because cats are creatures of habit, it doesn't take much to upset their sense of equilibrium. Changes in physical environment or even in his daily routine can upset him enough to alter his litterbox usage. Because these types of changes usually can't be unchanged (like a new spouse, baby, or work schedule), it's often best to confine your cat in a smaller space so that he can "relearn" good litterbox habits. Moving him to a small sanctuary space (a spare bedroom or even a bathroom) will reduce his options to the use of his litterbox. Further, it will allow him time to grow accustomed to the change in a safe, secure space.

Bear in mind that a "change" can be almost anything significant in the cat's life – a new piece of furniture, a change in litterbox location, even something as seemingly innocuous as a change in his food.

### **Spraying vs. Indiscriminate Urination**

Spraying is not the same as inappropriate urination. While the former tends to be on a vertical surface and looks like a line or stream, the latter tends to be on a horizontal surface and appears more puddle-like. While indiscriminate urination should respond to the solutions previously discussed, spraying likely will not.

Spraying can be indicative of territorial issues, the communication of information, or the result of competition with another cat in the household. Location of the spraying may give you an inkling as to its cause. Spraying near territorial boundaries like windows may indicate insecurity with outdoor feline visitors. Spraying around the house could indicate sibling tensions. Solving such problems may require the help of a behavior specialist. Please contact **WoofGang** at [laura@mywoofgang.com](mailto:laura@mywoofgang.com) or (646) 345-5116.

### **Final Thoughts**

If your cat eliminates outside his box, even if you catch him in the act, *do not punish him!* He won't understand that you're punishing the location of the behavior and not the behavior itself, and so he may hide when eliminating in anticipation of reprimand. Instead, clean the inappropriate area thoroughly with an enzymatic cleaner and create deterrents around that area to prevent a repeat offense. Confining him to a smaller space with his litterbox for a few weeks may also help him "forget" about that inappropriate area.

Remember that your cat is not being naughty. Not using his litterbox is his way of telling you something is wrong. It will just take patience and some creative sleuthing to reestablish a happy household.