

Litter Box Issues - Troubleshooting

If you've reviewed our informational sheet on setting your cat up for litter box success and you're still having issues, it may be time to troubleshoot. HAWS offers in-home behavior consultations to provide individualized recommendations for you and your cat. However, there are a number of things that you can consider and try before reaching out for assistance.

- **Make Sure Nothing is Wrong Medically**

The first thing you should always do is get your cat to the vet. There are a number of health reasons that can cause litter box issues that have relatively simple solutions. GI issues, internal parasites, urinary crystals, bladder stones, urinary tract infection, and diabetes are just a few of the possible medical reasons for litter box issues. If your cat is declawed, that could also cause litter box issues. Declawed cats are more prone to arthritis and discomfort using the litter box as they age. Joint supplements, pain medication, and softer litter may help here. You also want to consider your cat's age. If a cat is becoming senile, they may have difficulty controlling their bodily functions or recalling box location. Only a vet can give you these answers with certainty.

- **Revisit Setup**

When in doubt, clean more, add another box, or get a bigger box. If anything differs from the Litter Box Setup guide, that can cause issues. Even if your cat accepted exceptions you made initially, see if adhering to ALL recommendations helps.

- **Consider Environmental Stressors**

Cats are extremely environmentally sensitive. Any little change can rock a cat's world. Is there a new roommate? Outdoor cat? New pet? Did you redecorate? Did you change litter substrates? When moving a litter box or changing litter type, do so gradually to ease your cat into the change. Keep things as comfortable and consistent as possible, and spend a little extra time with your cat during times of change. If needed, confine your cat to their "base camp" room (see the Base Camp guide) during stressful times, such as a party. Utilize pheromone diffusers or play calming cat music to help your cat cope with change. Regularly play with your cat, as recommended in the Cat Play guide, to keep stress levels low.

- **Multicat Household Issues**

Cats are not only environmentally (their physical space) sensitive, but they are also territorially (social significance of space, access to resources) sensitive. Litter boxes are major territorial markers or "scent soakers." If you have multiple cats, make sure you have AT LEAST one litter box per cat plus one. The more the better. Space these litter boxes out throughout the household as well. If you have a multilevel home, have at least one box on each floor. Ensure that the litter boxes are easily accessible and not in places where one of the cats can ambush the other. A cat is very vulnerable when using the litter box and an ambush from another cat can easily cause litter box aversion for the victim.

If you have any issues with your cat not using the litter box- or any other behavioral issue- contact the HAWS Behavior Department at (262)542-8852 ext. 204. HAWS offers complementary behavior consultations for the life of your HAWS adoptee. We are here to help!