



## LITTER BOX TRAINING for KITTENS & CATS

Congratulations ! You got a new kitten ! Or maybe you just introduced an older cat to your home. There is always that tingle of excitement and anticipation when we bring a new pet into our lives and into our home. But there is always a lot of uncertainty as well ... right ???

How will your new companion fit in if you have other pets ? What will their personality be like ? Will they be very sociable with other pets and with people ... or will they be nervous and anxious with strangers ? What about houstraining ? How difficult will that be ? Will they like the food we offer ? Where will they sleep ? Will they keep us up at night ? Will there be separation anxiety issues when we leave them alone in the house ? If we need to travel, how will they do at a boarding facility ... or even riding in the car ? If we put them outside, will they wander, or will they stay around the yard ? And on and on ...

Like I said, there's lots of uncertainty with endless questions and unknown answers.

But when it comes to cats, one of the easiest behaviors we encounter is with litterbox training. Cats are (usually) so simple ! For the vast majority of cats, we don't need to do much more than to find a convenient area to place the litter box ... buy some kitty litter ... show your kitty where the litter box is ... then change or refresh the litter on a regular basis. That's it.

However ...

Not all cats follow our rulebook, and they may decide that they don't like where the box is placed ... or they don't like the type of litter we chose ... or the box isn't cleaned as often as they want ... or whatever ... and then accidents will happen. And we get frustrated and often upset. We might rant: "They should know better !" Uhhh, no, not necessarily.

So, what then ? Well, let's look at a number of things we can do to help resolve this problem.

First, if your kitty is going outside of the litter box, pay attention to where they are going. If she/he is pooping or peeing in a particular area, then place a litter box in that space. If they are going just outside of the box, then it could be several things: 1) they don't like the type of litter ... or 2) they may want to pee in one box, but poop in another box ... or 3) the box may not be big enough ... or 4) they may want more privacy ... or 5) they insist on a clean box ... or 6) they object to the odor ... or 7) they don't like the size of the grains of litter. How do we know what the problem is ? We often don't, but we can certainly experiment and see what works.

Here's my plan:

- 1) **They don't like the type of litter.** Some cats are (surprise !) fussier than others. You may need to try a different type of cat litter. There are MANY types of litter available, and there is no "one size fits all" variety that appeals to all cats. The more common ones are (1) clumping clay type, (2) non-clumping clay, (3) silica gel crystals and (4) recycled newspaper. Trial by error is the best way to tell if your cat shows a preference to one litter over the others.

- 2) **They pee in the box, but poop outside the box (or vice-versa).** This often suggests that you will need to add another litter box (or 2) to the house or area where your cat likes to hang out. You may even need to put one type of litter in one box ... and another type of litter in another box.
- 3) **The box may not be big enough.** If you have a bigger cat, they may prefer a larger box where they can feel securely and completely and comfortably inside the litterbox.
- 4) **They want more privacy.** For some cats, you may need to find a more secluded area that will appeal to your kitty. Other cats will be content if you have a covered box (with a removable lid) rather than a conventional open litter pan.
- 5) **They need a clean litter box.** If you are not diligent about frequently cleaning the litter box, they may not be willing to go inside the pan. (I certainly can't fault a cat for this at all.) Get busy with changing the litter box much more often, and your problems may go away.
- 6) **If you are using a scented kitty litter, the odor may be offensive and repel your cat.** Often, the scented litters are more for the benefit of us (pet parents) than for our cat. Find an unscented formula.
- 7) **They don't like the size of the grains of litter:** When using a clay-type litter, most cats prefer larger grains of clay. The smaller grains tend to stick to the cat's feet or get between their toes, which can be a real turn-off for your kitty.

It's important to realize that when you have multiple cats in the house, you can expect to need several litterboxes. How many will be necessary? I would suggest if you have more than 1 cat, have 1 more litter box than you have cats. For example, if you have 3 cats that live indoors, then have 4 litter boxes. This may not always be needed, but it's a starting point for most situations.

Also in households where there are 2 cats or more, the interaction between the personalities can play a huge role in their litterbox behavior. In those situations, I highly recommend the use of **Feliway**, a natural pheromone (natural cat scent) spray or diffuser that can reduce anxiety among the kitties in your house. Check out their website for more details: <https://www.feliway.com/us>.

Probably the most crucial element for cat owners to be on the lookout for is the cat that is making multiple trips to the litter box, especially trying to pee. This is a red flag for a urinary tract infection. And particularly in male cats, this can be a dangerous sign due to the possible presence of a blockage of the urethra (the tube that goes from the bladder to their penis). If a cat develops 'bladder stones' and the cat is unable to pass them, it can result in a **potentially life-threatening situation**. If you have a male cat, and he keeps trying to use the litter box, do not hesitate to take them to your full-service veterinary clinic ... or to your local emergency clinic ASAP !!!

Fortunately, the large majority of cat owners never need to address the litterbox behavior of their cats. But now you are prepared for a variety of different scenarios that may occur, along with common solutions to these issues. Don't be afraid to experiment to see what will work. However, I do recommend making only a couple of changes at a time to help get a better sense of what worked (or didn't work) for your precious kitty.

Enjoy your new furry friend !