From Mess to Success: Managing and Preventing Housesoiling

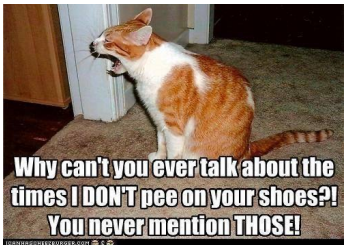
Tabitha Kucera RVT, VTS (Behavior), CCBC, KPA-CTP

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Why Litterbox Lessons are important

- Cats defecating and urinating outside the box is one of the most common behavioral issues among cats
- In many cases, it can be prevented/managed
- People often reach out to us for help



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Most common reasons for housesoiling

Medical (arthritis, diabetes, kidney issues, infections, pain, constipation, declawed)

Feline idiopathic cystitis/Pandora Syndrome/Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD)

Environmental and social factors

Marking behavior- Urine spraying is a normal feline behavior in which a cat marks to leave its scent



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Environmental and Social factors

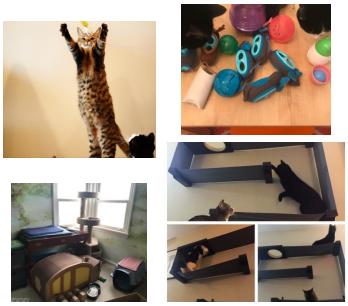
Lack of Enriched Enviorment

Stress

Inappropriate Litterbox Setup

Lack of Enrichment

Other animals in and out of the house, people



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Start the conversation

Actively listen and empathize

Ask open ended questions

- Talking point: Acknowledge their effort to seek help instead of making them feel guilty.
- Talking point: Express empathy without minimizing their frustration or overwhelm.

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Validate feelings and offer hope

- Avoid labels, address myths
  "spiteful" "Inappropriate"
- Provide caregiver's hope/support



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Respond with empathy, not judgment

- Open with empathy: "This is stressful and we can work through it."
- Recognize caregiver stress
- Listen to the full story before offering solutions.
- Reflect the concern, its impact, and the outcome the client wants.
- Ask focused questions: onset, location, frequency, posture, substrate, and recent changes.
- Confirm next steps and refer/work with veterinary team

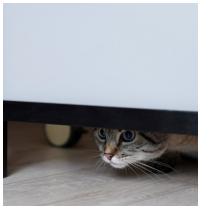


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Trauma Informed Communication

- Reflective listening → mirror emotions, validate without immediate advice
- Values-based questions → clarify priorities and goals
- Present options → give choices, stay neutral
- Boundaries → maintain scope, protect energy



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Scenario:
Caregiver overwhelmed by their cat housesoiling and causing strain on their marriage

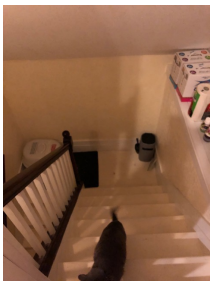
- How could reflective listening validate their feelings? Avoid labels address myths, its important that both at consult so can hear everyone's concerns and input and everyone can feel heard ive tried everything.. Reframe problem behavior as normal behavior
- What values-based questions could guide decision-making?
- Where could you present options without taking over? When talking about litterbox changes, may start with taking a look on the first floor and sending a few places you would feel comfortable having a box vs place a box on first floor
- What boundaries are important to maintain? I'm here to guide and support you as you put these steps into action, work with your vet team, patient advocate

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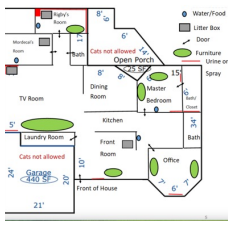
Obtain more information

- Understand the full context
- Explore medical possibilities
- Consider behavioral and emotional factors
- Obtain more information/patterns
  - Via videos, blacklight party, and journal- where how much



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Medical: Diagnostics to start

Obtain history
Exam (including a basic orthopedic and neurologic assessment)
Perform additional diagnostics based on hx/exam findings
Urinalysis/ Urine Culture via cystocentesis
Bloodwork (cbc/chem/t4)
Radiographs
Manage pain
Manage anxiety



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Marking



Spraying

Catheath.com

- May be territorial, hormonal, or anxiety-induced
- Adults
- Most common in intact males and females in estrus followed by neutered males
- Purposes of communicating among cats
- Urine (feces is rare)
- Usually small amounts
- Generally vertical surfaces
- Prominent upright surfaces in the home: doors, windows, new objects, freq used furniture, cabinets

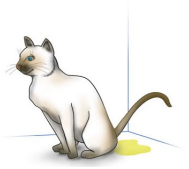
*Behavior Problems of the Dog & Cat, Landsberg

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Housesoiling

- Any age
- Males or females, intact or neutered
- Urine and/or feces
- Usually larger amounts
- Horizontal surfaces
- May eliminate on specific surfaces or selected locations but may also have no obvious preference



*Behavior Problems of the Dog & Cat, Landsberg

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Where to get started

- Create a feline friendly enviorment
- Meet physical, social, and mental needs
- Set up appropriate litterbox setup
- ID/manage/rule out medical issues
- Management

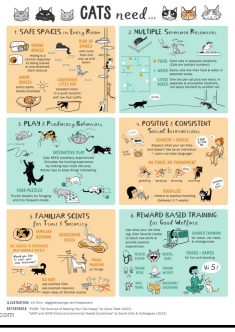


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5 pillars of a healthy feline environment

- Provide multiple safe places
- Provide multiple and separated key environmental resources: food, water, litterboxes, scratching areas, play areas, and resting/sleeping areas
- Provide opportunity for play and predatory behavior
- Provide positive, consistent, and predictable human-cat, cat-dog social interactions
- Provide an environment that respects the importance of a cats smell



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Provide an environment that respects the importance of a cat's smell



- Maintain familiar scents
- Pheromones
- Promote scent marking
- Ensure scent consistency



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Manage/reduce stressors

- Reduce stress
- Provide structure and predictability
- Identify and manage or remove stressors

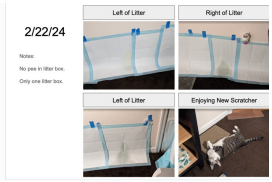


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Manage the environment

- Prevent/minimize access
- Clean thoroughly
- Put clothing away instead of on floor. Place shoes, backpacks and luggage with unfamiliar odors off the floor and out of your cat's reach.
- Adapt environment/ litterbox to cats needs
- Change the function of area where they urinate

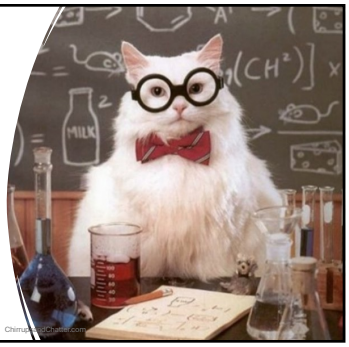


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Litterbox Lessons

- Size and visibility
- Number
- Placement
- Litter
- Cleaning and maintenance



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Size and Visibility

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Litterboxes should be BIG!

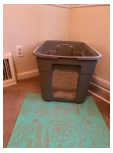
1.5 times the length of the cat

Large enough for the cats to dig and comfortably and turn around

Clear

Reduce ambush potential







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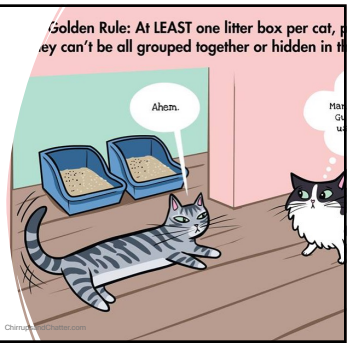
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I need how many boxes?!

1 per cat plus 1

In multiple locations

Cats prefer to defecate and urinate in different locations



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Placement- What to do

- Easy Access
- Each Floor
- Quiet Places

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Location Matters

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Consider the Individual for Placement



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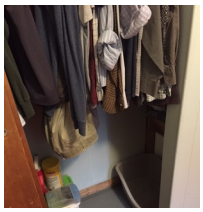
Placement- What to avoid

Avoid ambush areas (cornered, unable to flee, blocked off)

Avoid basements and closets

Avoid placing near food and water

Avoid placing near loud appliances (furnace, washing machine)



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What not to do

- Ambush potential high
- Closed in
- Covered boxes







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Examples of what not to do



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Provide multiple and separated key environmental resources

- Door Buddy Door Latch
- Door straps
- Safety 1st Prograde No Drill Top Of Door Lock
- Baby gates with cat doors/Elevate off the ground



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Litter

- Clumping
- Unscented
- Soft
- 2-3 inches of litter
- Consistent level



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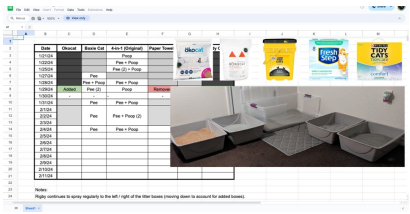
Litters most cats do not prefer



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Individual cat's preference
Ask the cat



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Cleaning and maintenance



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Cleaning and maintenance

Scoop once to twice daily

Wash the box every 4-6 weeks using unscented mild soap

Boxes should be replaced every 2 years

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A note on robots



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A note on this…..



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Senior/Declawed/Handicapped cats

Use low entrance litterboxes for easy entry and exit
Place boxes in easily accessible areas
Place box where you cat spends most of their time
Use adequate amounts of litter and scoop daily
Use a night light to make finding box easier
Use a litter with a fine consistency that's easy on paws
Appropriately sized box

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Think outside of the box

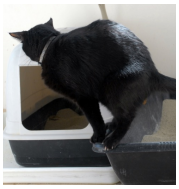





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May still use it even if they dislike it

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Build a practical, shared plan

- Explain that house soiling signals an unmet medical, physical, social, or environmental need.
- Tailor the litter-box plan: number, location, size, entry, litter, depth, and cleaning routine.
- Change one variable at a time when practical, then track the cat's response.
- End with a written plan: actions, caregiver, timing, and follow-up date.

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Coach for follow-through

- Set realistic expectations: progress may be gradual, and setbacks provide useful information.
- Track location, timing, urine or stool, context, and litter-box use.
- Define what improvement looks like and schedule a specific follow-up.
- Reinforce small wins; troubleshoot cost, space, time, and household barriers without blame.
- Escalate persistent or complex cases to the veterinarian or veterinary behaviorist.
- Protect welfare and the human–cat bond with safety, choice, predictability, and no punishment.



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Always remember

Never punish or scold the cat

Rule out and address medical issues

Set cats up for success by creating a cat friendly environment

Address physical, social, and mental needs

A cat's relationship with their litterboxes is complex

If need help, contact a certified cat behavior consultant, vts in behavior, and/or veterinary behaviorist



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Resources





RESCue

House-Soiling 101

What Every Cat Caregiver Needs to Know

by Tabitha Kucera RVT/VTS (Behaviour), CCBC, KPA-CTP
Chirrupsandchatter.com

House-soiling is a common concern among cat caregivers, but it is important to remember that cats do not urinate or defecate outside the litterbox out of spite. There are many potential reasons for this behavior, including medical, behavioral, and environmental factors

Setting Cats Up for Success

Meeting your cat's physical, social, and emotional needs from the start helps prevent and is a foundation in resolving house-soiling

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Thank you!

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