

The question I am most often asked and most often consulted about fixing the problem is “Why doesn’t my cat use the litter box?”

Litter box problems seem to be the biggest issue cat owner’s deal with on an ongoing basis. I believe more cats end up in shelters or homeless on the street because of this single problem than for any other reason.

When a client calls me to ask if we can arrange for me to come to their home to communicate with their cat(s) about a litter box problem the first question I ask them is “Have you taken the cat to a Veterinarian for a checkup?” If the answer is “no”, I ask them to please see the Vet and have the cat checked for a urinary or bladder problem. Quite often the cat is suffering from some kind of a UTI. The animal does not have any other way to tell us they are experiencing discomfort or pain. They simply stop using the litter box. If the answer to the question is, “Yes, they have seen a Vet.” I schedule a visit to their home.

Once I am in their home I will visit with the cat(s) and ask them what is going on. I do this by picturing (in my mind) the litter box and trying to visualize the cat using it. Often the cat will show me a very dirty litter box. I don’t care to use a dirty port-a-let and neither does your cat. It is a very delicate matter to try to explain to someone that the box is simply too nasty for the cat to use, but I try to be very tactful and tell them it is time to thoroughly wash the box, change the litter and scoop out the solid waste on a very routine basis.

Other times the cat has a box with a cover on it or the box is situated under something like a table or work bench in the basement that makes it feel like it is covered. It keeps the room much tidier but many cats do not like to use covered boxes because they feel trapped. Maybe the box is even crammed in a corner where there is little to no space. Removing the cover from the box or moving the box from a corner can often solve the problem.

Many cats have boxes located in a basement or garage. It can be very dark at night. Cats do see better than we do in dim light but they do not see in total darkness. Often they are afraid that another animal in the house is going to trap them while they are using the litter box. A companion cat or a dog living with them might think it is great fun to keep the non-box user out of the litter box. Perhaps the second animal is just having some fun with the first one but in any event it causes the non-box user to stop using the litter box for fear of being trapped or attacked. I suggest a night light be placed in the room with the litter box. It does not need to be a full size light. A simple 4 watt night light can work wonders. The cat is then able to see if another animal is present. I have night lights all over my house. Not just for the cats but for myself as well. With the little lights I can move around my house with enough visibility at night that I do not need to turn on overhead lighting. I also do not trip over things that might be on the floor. It cost pennies to operate but it can save a fortune in damage to carpeting, wood floors, or furniture.

If you have tried all of these ideas and the cat is still not using the box I suggest you experiment with different kinds of litter. Sometimes a second box is very helpful. Cats are fastidious animals and DO NOT like to use a soiled box. Hopefully one of these ideas will make a difference for you and your cat(s). That will make life a lot easier for everyone in the household including the cat. Good luck.