

Behavior: Litter Box Training

Get your kitten off to a good start with an appropriate litter box. Often a plastic box is the most practical and easy to clean. The sides should be low enough that your kitten can easily climb in and out. Place the box in a relatively quiet area of the home with minimal traffic, where the kitten can have some privacy. Be certain the box is easily accessible, perhaps near to the kitten's sleeping area. Some kittens dislike scented litter; it is usually best to start with an unscented clay or clumping litter. If you already have cats at home, provide an additional box for each new cat. Most kittens will automatically use kitty litter in preference to other surfaces, except perhaps for the soil of a potted plant. To prevent mishaps, keep plants out of the kitten's reach or cover the soil with pine cones or decorative rock.

To ensure that your kitten uses its litter box every time, always keep it within eyesight. If it stops playing and begins sniffing around, gently carry it to the litter box. Praise any sniffing or scratching, and give it loads of praise or a small food treat for eliminating. Whenever you are unable to watch the kitten, restrict it to a cat-proofed room with its litter box. Do this for at least the first two weeks, until your kitten is using the box regularly. Keep the box clean so that your cat will return to use it. Once you have found a brand of litter, type of box, and location that your kitten likes, avoid making sudden changes. If you want to change the litter, place the new box with the new litter in the new location, but do not take away the old box until the kitten is using the new litter. Or try mixing the new and old for a few weeks.

Since it is important that the kitten feel comfortable around its litter box, try to prevent anything unpleasant from happening when it is near its box. Don't give your cat medicine or scold it when it's near the box. Locate the box in an area free of startling noise, such as a washing machine, radiator, or furnace. If you need to keep your kitten away from children or dogs, use a baby gate with a kitty door.

When Mistakes Occur

It doesn't take long for a kitten to develop bad habits, so it is essential that you identify and correct mistakes right away.

Causes of Housesoiling

- Change in the brand of litter
- Scented litter additives or the odor of cleansers/deodorants
- The litter box is not cleaned frequently enough
- The litter box was moved to a noisy area
- The kitten was frightened in or near the box
- Medical problems



Most cats will not soil an area where their food or water bowl is placed. To decrease the appeal of the soiled area, place a sheet of plastic carpet runner, two-sided sticky tape, an aversive odor (perfume, deodorized soap), or a motion detector alarm in the area. Never punish a kitten for making a mess outside of its litter box. Punishment usually makes things worse or creates other problems such as fear of the owner, especially if you swat your kitten or rub its nose in the mess. Using a covered litter box can control the odor in the home and be helpful for kittens with poor aim. If your cat refuses to use a covered box, condition it to this setup by placing a large cardboard box over the litter box. Gradually decrease the size of the cardboard box until it approximates the commercial box. Then make the switch.

If your kitten continues to eliminate out of the litter box, take it to your veterinarian for a physical exam, and possibly lab tests to make sure there are no existing medical problems. For example, bladder diseases, diarrhea, and constipation can be irritating for the pet and cause it to avoid the box.

Spraying

- As kittens mature, they may begin to spray. Spraying is a form of territorial marking—cats typically will urinate on vertical surfaces such as walls and furniture. Although neutering eliminates most spraying, some neutered cats do spray. If the problem persists after neutering, seek advice from your veterinarian.
- Kittens are creatures of habit. Once you find a litter and box location that your cat likes, stick with it.

Adapted from material originally developed by Wayne L. Hunthausen, DVM, and Gary M. Landsberg, DVM

If you need further assistance go to www.petsforlife.org,
www.mobilesPCA.org or email the Mobile SPCA
at sPCA@mobilesPCA.org



Mobile SPCA

620 Zeigler Circle West
Mobile, AL 36608

633-3531

sPCA@mobilesPCA.org