



Module 22: Feline Psychiatric Challenges

- The ins and outs of litter trays
- Why cats soil other places
- How to deal with litter challenges
- About jumping up

This module will highlight the following points:

- The ins and outs of litter trays
- Why cats soil other places
- How to deal with litter challenges
- About jumping up
- About caterwauling
- About cat aggression and intervention

Feline Psychiatric Challenges - 4m46s

22.1 Introduction

Cats are independent creatures, but they can become accustomed to certain routines and habits that you have.

They also have a few ways to speak with you vocally and through body language.

If you ignore this behaviour you may find that your cat is exhibiting some psychiatric changes or challenges that baffle you. For your cat this change in behaviour can be perfectly acceptable because they are trying to tell you something.

22.2 Ins and Outs of Litter Trays



Litter boxes or trays are a main part of your cat's life.

This is the place they will eliminate, and just like you they want a clean place to go. The heightened sense of smell your cat has ensures they can smell scents that are imperceptible to you. You may smell your cat's litter box after a week, but your cat will notice it immediately.

The first thing to do is let your new kitten know where they are able to eliminate.

If your kitten has not been litter trained or fully litter trained you will need to work on this with them.

There will be more on soiling later, but for now you need to praise your kitten when they use the litter box appropriately. You need to place the litter box in an area your cat will be able to access it and will not get locked out of. If you place it in a busy area, such as a laundry room with a door, you may need to prop the door open - or you may need to have a cat-door installed.

Not all cats will use the litter box in the same way. Cats that love to be clean will spend up to a minute covering their elimination. They will also scratch the top of the litter pan if you have one. The idea is to get their waste covered successfully but also to leave their scent behind.

Your cat may not be as fastidious in covering their waste. There are some who are not as careful, or they like to leave their scent on the top of the litter pan but forget to actually cover their waste. If you have more than one cat you may find your other cat is always going in after the other to make sure things are covered. Since litter training is learned and can be learned from another cat - then with regards to sanitary practices, a little kitten may never be as fastidious as their older companion.

You need to watch out for a few things to make your cat's litter tray more comfortable to

use. This will also deter them from soiling in other places:

- If you have more than one cat you should clean the box at least every three days.
- It is better to scoop out the used litter each day.
- You need to switch litter as soon as it begins to smell or the crystals change colour. Most litter brands have a colour changing litter to help you know when you need to change it.
- If you clean out the litter box daily you may not have to change the litter each week, but on a biweekly basis.
- Monitor your cat's behaviour when they use the box.

You should know your cat's normal litter box behaviour. For instance, let's say you have three cats. The older cat may spend more time in the litter box. You may hear excessive scratching of all surfaces and see that your cat is fastidious in covering the waste. The middle cat may not be as good at covering over waste. This cat spends less time in the box for all things, but as soon as this cat is out then the older cat returns. This is because the older cat cleans up after the middle cat. The third cat may be more like the first by not only covering waste but also in leaving his/her scent behind. The older cat, due to age, may need longer to go.

As cats age their bladder needs to be emptied more often and more fibre is required to make elimination easier. The second cat has always had a better cleaner, so this second cat did not learn to be as thorough. The third cat learns from both, but in this instance the breed is a fastidious one. The third cat in our example always wants clean litter and more frequent changes than the other two.

If you find your cat is meowing after each use of the litter, you need to check two things:

Is there a medical problem? Medical problems can include low fibre diets or kidney crystals. Improper diet can lead to kidney crystals, as can stress. If there is no blood, no extra excursion, or issues with soiling in softer locations, your cat probably is meowing to get the litter changed or at least sifted. The meow may occur before or after they get out of the box.

It is a meow that says "you need to clean the box" and "I don't really want to use it". Most cats will still use it but they will start to become stressed which can lead to more problems later on. If the litter has recently been attended to and there are no medical problems then your cat could be telling you they did a good job and would like some attention or praise for it. It will depend on how they were trained and if rewards were given.

22.3 Why Cats Soil Other Places



Cats will soil other places for several reasons.

The first reason to eliminate elsewhere is the litter box. A dirty litter box can become a source of feline psychiatric challenges, including kidney crystals as a result of stress.

If the box is clean, consider if you changed the litter to a different brand or if the brand you use has changed its formula. It does happen and it could mean your cat no longer likes the scent they are inundated with when they go into the tray.

The last reason, with regards to litter trays, is the age of the tray. Trays are plastic and degrade over time. You should frequently clean the box, such as each month, with soap and water. If you notice that the dirt of the litter or waste is no longer coming off the sides and bottom after a clean, it is time to change the boxes. About every three to five years you should change the box. You also need to change the filter every six months.

When you have ruled out the litter box you then need to consider that your cat may be alerting you to a medical issue. This is usually displayed by coming to you, peeing on your favourite soft blanket while you are under it, or targeting other soft surfaces. Usually you will see your cat squat and raise their tail before they soil a different spot.

If it is not a medical condition it could be related to their feelings. Did you leave them alone for a few days? Did they feel abandoned because you went on holiday? Is there a new pet in the house? Did this behaviour start after you had a child? Did you suddenly not have time to play with your cat, give them lap affection or let them sleep with you at night? Sometimes soiling other places is about their desire for attention. They will soil something you love and get reprimanded as a way to get attention.

If it is not about getting attention your cat might have reached its sexual maturity and feel the need to mark its territory to tell other cats it is ready. If there was an introduction of a new smell, or there is something to fear or feel anxiety over, your cat may soil a place other than their litter box. By paying attention you can eliminate certain reasons, identify the issue and adjust to ensure your cat is comfortable soiling their litter box and nowhere else.

22.4 How to Deal with Litter Challenges



The above has focused on eliminating reasons your cat may not want to use the litter box; however, there can be other issues.

There may be challenges getting your cat properly trained. Perhaps, when your cat was a kitten they were frightened by an experience using a litter box. You can help your cat get over their issues by first acknowledging there is something wrong, whether it is a fear, anxiety or simple problem.

If you can eliminate the stimuli that cause the problem it will prevent the problem from occurring. If you cannot eliminate it, then help your cat. Carry your cat immediately to the box when they start to squat. Praise your cat if they remain in the box and go to the toilet - give a treat, pet, cuddle or praise

Never shout, hit or verbally reprimand your cat when they cause an issue by eliminating in the wrong place or in their litter box.

Sometimes all your cat needs is privacy. The box might be in a heavy traffic area, which makes them skittish to use it. Changing it to a quieter corner., having a lid on it, or building a box around the litter container that they can step into before getting into the tray are all ways that you might be able to help.

Always make certain your cat is comfortable.

22.5 Jumping Up



Jumping up onto other surfaces can be a common behaviour of your cat, simply because they love to jump and explore.

For you it is a vexing problem; especially if there are areas they are allowed to go and other places you never want them to be.

Some of this requires changing your behaviour.

If you do not leave dishes on the counters, food out, or plastic they might want to chew, they may get

up and then get down from the counter. The idea is to 'cat proof' your home so they cannot break, chew or destroy counter areas. Your cat may get up to these high places when you are not home, but not when you are home. Some cats learn they cannot do it in your sight and thus wait.

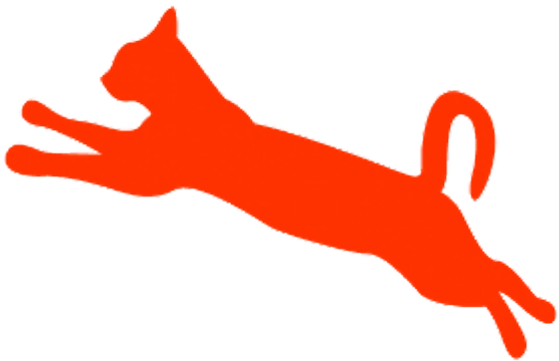
You may also be perfectly fine with your cat getting onto some surfaces like the bathroom counter, bathtub side, toilet, desk, or cat towers. You have to teach your cat what is acceptable and rewarded behaviour.

If your cat gets into places you do not want them to you should simply remove them. Pick them up and put them on the floor or nudge them off the surface.

When they are in/on a place you allow, pet them, praise them, cuddle them for a moment, or give them a treat. They will start to associate the differences and exhibit desirable behaviour.

It can also be about providing your cat with the proper areas to go. Your cat likes high places. If you have tall cat towers, shelves they can climb and areas to explore higher up, they are less likely to go where they get into trouble.

FACT



A cat can jump up to six times its length.

Source: buzzfeed.com

22.6 Caterwauling



Caterwauling is the equivalent of shouting for a cat.

It is usually done when there is a threat in sight but it can also be about getting your attention.

Your cat may not go to the extent of caterwauling but they may shout. Their shout is a higher pitched meow that they use when something is wrong because it gets your attention. However, they might use it just to get your attention.

You do not want to reward this sort of behaviour. You do need to eliminate the reason for it, though, such as a litter box issue, medical problem or if they want food.

If all that is eliminated it means they are shouting for your attention. Ignore the meows initially, but after about 10 minutes play with your cat. Also set a routine to continue playing with your cat each day for at least 20 minutes to an hour. It will help.

22.7 Cat Aggression and How You Can Intervene

Cat aggression is more common than we realise and it can be challenging to identify triggers.

Cat aggression can manifest itself in many ways including injuries to other cats, other pets or to people. In serious cases, cats have been sent to shelters due to aggression issues.

However, proper intervention (and medication) may help in many cases.

Typical body language and signs of aggression include:

- Dilated pupils and ears flattened backwards
- Erect tail and arched back
- Hissing or spitting
- Puffed hair

Veterinary diseases such as dental problems, osteoporosis and hyperthyroidism can lead to pain and consequently, aggression. Cats also display play aggression when they interact with other cats. If you find them becoming too aggressive, use a small noise (like a bell) to divert his attention. If your cat becomes aggressive while playing with you, walk away and ignore her. This may teach her that undesirable actions will not get your approval or attention.

Some cats become aggressive with excessive petting. If your cat happens to be one of these, stop the petting at once and allow a 'cooling period' before renewing physical contact. It may be particularly important to limit the interaction of small children with aggressive cats.

Summary

Your cat can have some behavioural challenges that are taught from an early age or develop due to your relationship with your cat. Cats can become jealous of new people, pets, babies or devices. A simple correction is to give your cat the attention it desires.

Other corrections may require more study to eliminate certain reasons behind the behaviour, such as improper use of the litter box, soiling where they should not, and how to deal with challenges with litter training. Your cat can be trained not to jump up or shout when there is nothing but attention wanted. It just takes an observant owner. You also looked at cat aggression and appropriate intervention.

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