

Safe Room for Retraining Your Cat

House soiling and marking behaviours in cats can often be caused by anxiety regarding territory. The problem is quite common in multi-pet households and shows up when changes happen in a cat's life. The changes may not seem huge to us but something like getting new furniture may rock your cat's world and cause a lot of stress.

If you suspect that your cat's house soiling problems may be due to concern about territory, a period of confinement may help relieve your cat's stress and will give you more influence over the variables and thus a better idea of what may be causing the problem.

Using the Safe Room to Resolve House Soiling

1. Pick a room in your home to be your kitty's room. Your cat will be living in only this room for at least a couple of weeks. Make it into your cat's sanctuary- plenty of perching spots, classical music playing, and a Feliway diffuser (<http://www.feliway.com/gb>).
2. Put a couple of litterboxes in the special room. You can vary the types of litter used in each, along with using both covered and uncovered litterboxes. This is your chance to find out your cat's preferences.
3. Spend lots of time in the room with your cat. Have playtime and relaxation time.
4. If you normally use catnip, switch to honeysuckle - many cats like it and it is more soothing.
5. If your cat soils anywhere but the litterbox, be sure to use a proper enzymatic cleaner to clean it up.
6. Wash litterboxes with a mild, unscented dish detergent. Don't use any heavily scented cleaning products, particularly avoid anything lemon-scented (this applies to day-to-day, as well- most cats are repelled by citrus scent), or ammonia based.

Working With Confinement in Multi-Pet Households

In multi-pet households, we want the cat to still know the other pets exist and to acquire a positive feeling about the other pets. We can help them with this process.

1. Feed both the confined cat and the other household pets at the same time on either side of the door. You want them to associate one another's scents with plentiful resources and a pleasurable experience.
2. Switch your different pets' bedding between the 'safe room' and other locations in the house, thus allowing all your pets to have "scent parties" and remain positively familiar with their animal mates.
3. If your cat's stress seems to be connected to the other pets in your home, you will need to gradually reintroduce your cat to visually interact with their furry friends. You can start this by using a lattice or a screen door over their 'safe room' door, allowing for visual interaction but not physical interaction. You can also use a crate for this. Try to

keep the periods of visual interaction short initially and keep movement, etc. to a minimum.

Your cat may object to the confinement at first but give it time. If they're still getting adequate affection and exercise, they will likely soon come to tolerate the new setup.

Reintroducing Confined Cats to the Household

1. When your cat has been reliably using only the litterbox for elimination for at least one week with no accidents, you can begin to **slowly** reintroduce them to the rest of the house. An hour or so at a time is enough at first.
2. It's best if you can continue to restrict territory and open access to different rooms a little at a time. This will help your cat readapt at a comfortable pace and will also allow you to carefully observe your cat's behaviour for signs of stress.
3. If there is a house-soiling incident, back up a few steps and think carefully about what changes have occurred and what may be the stressor. See if you can eliminate the stressor or recondition/desensitize your cat to it before you proceed again.
4. Remember, the more slowly you proceed, the better your cat's chances of success.
5. We also recommend using Feliway throughout the house, especially during the time of reintroduction.

If you think you need some help with your cat's behaviour that may require the use of a safe room, you can always call our behaviour outreach line at 403-723-6019 or book a consultation via our website <https://www.calgaryhumane.ca/what-we-do/animal-training/private-consultations/>