

We didn't know better, years ago we thought that was just what you did with indoor-only cats, you de-claw them so they don't tear things up. The first two seemed to have no problems, then the new kitten was declawed (this was all over 30 years ago) and she had problems. Her little feet were so sore she wouldn't walk on them. She sat with her front feet in the air and limped everywhere for weeks. How she managed to keep using the box, I'll never know. We never had trouble with anyone not using the box until much later. And then came Bobby.

Mr. Bobby showed up with some neighbor kids and saw us as a more reliable source of food and shelter. At first he lived under our back stairs but as the weather got colder we brought him in and took him to the vet. He had to be fixed and declawed, right? No one else had front claws and he wasn't going back out. So we took him to Miss Priss' vet and from the time he came home again it was obvious that something had gone just as wrong as with Miss Priss. He didn't seem to be in as much pain as she had been but his feet never looked or felt "right" again.

Eventually, all four of those cats developed weird behaviors and physical traits. Sookie had large, weird calluses on her front toes, after we moved Charlie began spraying and inappropriately soiling the house, Miss Priss hated being handled or brushed, and developed horrible mats along her back and sides. Mr. Bobby eventually developed arthritis in his front legs and was confined to one room because he became unable or unwilling to move fast enough to get to the box in time and his once sweet, laid-back nature began to unravel. Both Mr. Bobby and Miss Priss had flattened looking feet after their surgeries. It almost looked like their toes had been completely removed. We changed vets and never considered declawing again.

As far as damages go, there's not much difference between a declawed cat and a cat with claws. They may not be as able to climb vertically but they can still jump on counters and furniture. A clawed cat renders litter box liners useless since they snag the liner but a declawed cat has a greater chance of litter avoidance because of pain from the surgery. But a clawed cat can also avoid their box if it's in a space they're not comfortable in. One clawed kitten avoided her box as long as it was in sight of the laundry room where the dogs could watch her use it. Once it was moved into the hall, the cat went right back to it. As long as they can get on a shelf, table, or counter, they're able to cause trouble and break things, regardless of claw status. They could still kick and bite and get into places they shouldn't be in.

Trial and error proved that different cats like different textures to scratch on. One liked sisal, others preferred cardboard, everyone liked textured, tapestry-like upholstery and one odd-ball really liked the corner of the brick fireplace surround. We got used to packing tape loops on the furniture to discourage scratching and discovered that people nail clippers could be used to trim the claws. Is nail clipping inconvenient? Yes, but so is cleaning the litter box, wiping cat hair off the furniture, and hair balls in the middle of the floor. Is it time consuming? No more time consuming than scooping/cleaning/changing the litter box. Cats are not untrainable. Patience and repetition work for cats the same way as with dogs and people.

As long as you have pets, there will be damages and inconveniences. Accidents happen. Dishes get broken, clothes get snagged, inedible things get eaten. The cats will need shots and regular vet visits the same as flu shots and yearly physicals for yourself or your kids and they will always come up right when you don't have the time or money to take care of it. Mutilating a cat just to stop one thing from happening, when it's going to end up causing more trouble down the line, is cruel. Animals rely on us to protect them. We shouldn't be causing them pain to make it "easier" on ourselves. It breaks my heart to think of the unnecessary and avoidable pain we caused Miss Priss, Mr. Bobby, Charlie, and Sookie. Mickie Foote, Bo Doodle, Lil Rider, Molly, Sam, Elizabeth, Peeker, Kitty-Kat, Abie, Stevie-Moo, Mouse, Misha Colins and Dorian Gray all kept their claws and so far none of them have shown the obvious problems that could be tied to declawing the other four. No tenderness of the feet, no limping, no stiffness in the wrists or shoulders. Two have lived to be at least as old as Mr. Bobby and one is fifteen now and doesn't have any of the mobility problems he did.