



Buttercup's Training Plan: Building Engagement

Overall Goal:

The primary goal is to help Buttercup become a more resilient, flexible dog by transforming your walks and interactions into a partnership. This involves becoming a "good fellow creature"—a supportive and engaging leader she can trust, especially during scary moments.

Part 1: The “Good Fellow Creature” Walk

The foundation of this plan is changing the dynamic of your walks. The walk is not just for Buttercup’s benefit; it's a shared experience.

- **Share the Lead:**
 - **Your Turn:** Have ideas for the walk. Decide to explore a new path, turn down a different street, or visit a specific spot.
 - **Her Turn:** Allow her time to choose the direction. Let her follow a scent and explore what interests her.
- **Inject Fun & Spontaneity:**
 - Bring a tug toy for a quick, happy play session mid-walk.
 - Toss a treat into the grass for her to find.
 - Actively explore a new area of the woods together.

- **Be an Engaged Partner:** During the easy, calm parts of the walk, be a presence. Don't just be the person at the other end of the leash. This builds the trust you'll need for tougher times.

Part 2: Managing Fearful Situations (Triggers)

When Buttercup encounters something scary (a loud truck, a barking dog, a train), your role is to be her calm and steady support system.

- **Immediate Plan:**
 1. **Create Distance:** As soon as you notice a trigger, your first job is to increase the distance between Buttercup and the scary thing. Don't force her to "face her fears" up close.
 2. **Offer Support:** Once you're at a more comfortable distance, just hang with her. She does well with just sitting through it. Your calm presence is the most important tool.
 3. **Acknowledge Recovery:** Praise her when she shakes it off. She recovers very quickly, which is a huge positive!

Part 3: The Core Principle: Engagement is "Money in the Bank"

Engagement is the key to everything. Positive, fun interactions during calm times build up a bank of trust that you can draw from when things get scary.

- **Fill the Bank:** The ratio of positive to negative experiences is critical. You may need 10 positive, engaged moments (exploring a smell together, playing tug) to help her through one scary moment.
- **What Engagement Looks Like:**
 - Playing fetch and tug at home.

- Giving praise, affection, and verbal encouragement.
- Showing her you're a team, both on and off the leash.
- *Note:* While she may not always take them, continue to bring a treat or a toy on walks. You never know when she might be open to it.
- **Give Her Breaks:** Constant engagement isn't necessary. Allow her time to just sniff and be a dog. The goal is to be a team that she can check in with.

Part 4: Your Mindset & Focus

How you approach this is just as important as what you do.

- **Focus on the Positive:** It can be hard, but try to focus on what she's doing right.
 - How quickly did she rebound from that scary sound?
 - How was she more flexible on this walk?
 - Did she listen to your suggestion to change direction?
- **Show Her She's Capable:** When she is hesitant and loses her flexibility, gently show her that she *can* do it. The example of giving a slight push from behind instead of pulling the leash is a perfect example of supportive leadership.

Next Steps

- Let's plan for a follow-up session in **4 to 6 weeks**.
- You may wish to consider having the next session at your home to work on challenges specific to this environment.
- Most importantly, be patient and have confidence in yourselves and in

Buttercup. She has made quite a bit of progress, so make sure that you reward yourself (and Buttercup!) by celebrating her victories.