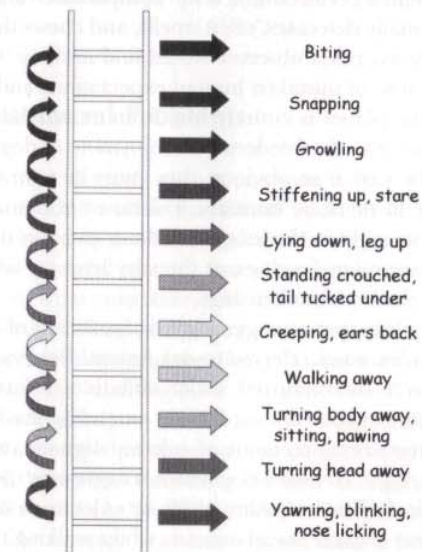


**Fig. 13.1.** The body language of dogs, related to different social attitudes. Reproduced with kind permission from BSAVA.

have enormous significance for particular dogs, but less in others. These are part of a so-called appeasement complex of gestures, designed to invite approach and friendship in potentially threatening encounters.

A detailed description of canine signals and their significance in social behaviours is provided by Shepherd (2002). These are of especial importance to owners when discussing aggressive or threat behaviours by dogs. Most dog bites are

### The Canine ‘Ladder of Aggression’



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**Fig. 13.2.** The ‘ladder of aggression’ in dogs, outlining the different escalation phases a dog will typically go through in connection with aggressive behaviour. Reproduced with kind permission from Kendal Shepherd.

evoked or precipitated by inappropriate actions of humans. The important skill needed by people interacting with dogs is to recognize the interaction between signals representing threat-reducing ‘appeasement’ gestures versus those signalling defensive, even offensive, threat. Shepherd’s ‘ladder of aggression’ in Fig. 13.2 shows the fluidity or interconnectedness of dogs’ reactions which are alternatively threatened or threaten.

### Consequences of behavioural disorders

Numerous statistics attest to the life-threatening penalty for any companion animal that presents a behavioural problem to its owner. In this hygiene-conscious age, a dog that eliminates in the home is liable first to receive unremitting punishment, then to be excluded to the outdoors, then finally to be euthanased. Aggression or injury to the owner by the dog is similarly a strong predisposing factor to being euthanased. Estimates of the proportion of young and juvenile dogs euthanased vary between countries, but most studies suggest that more than half of such requests for euthanasia are because they engage in inconvenient or dangerous behaviours (Stead, 1982; Sigler, 1991).