Residential work embraces many of the complexities of family living while adding some of its own. Because it is concerned with the whole of an individual’s life it will encompass all the emotions which are a part of living – joy, sorrow, fulfilment and despair. The residential unit must not take responsibility for all these areas for adults must plan their own lives, but staff must be aware that what is termed residential work for them, is residential living for the residents. To carry out their work, staff need knowledge of individuals and groups (from psychology and social psychology), knowledge of the social context in which the individual and the centre are placed (from sociology and social administration), knowledge of the past of the individual, the centre and society. Too often an event is looked at separately from its historical and social context. And without a sense of continuity present practice may be based on avoiding past mistakes rather than on planning for the present. In addition to such knowledge staff also need an opportunity for intimacy, caring, spontaneity and creativity. Thinking about practice does not mean that feelings must be ignored.

In this chapter I shall consider various aspects: assessment, analysis, developing and testing theories, planning and reflection. These are components of working consciously or working with an awareness of the reasons for one’s action. This style of working may be thought to contrast with a natural or intuitive style. Thus the intuitive worker is seen as one who responds immediately without stopping to reason. Such a picture distorts the process by which people reach
decisions about action. For both styles of worker the important questions concern the preparation for action. An immediate response is based on several factors: the perception of what has happened, memory of other similar incidents, recall of the way other people have responded in similar situations. It is essential that all workers are thoroughly prepared and are able to discuss the reasons for particular actions.

Good preparation leads to the possibility of an emotional response, one that allows for spontaneity, creativity or intimacy. Such a response is not casual. For example, a physically handicapped resident of 45 swears at the care assistant when she is called one morning. She makes it clear that she has no intention of getting up, wants to be left alone and is fed up. The care assistant is taken by surprise for the resident has never behaved like this before, but responds by pulling the bed covers off, turning on the radio and saying, 'It's bacon for breakfast', and going out.

There has been no time for much planning but the care assistant's action must be seen in a wider context. She knows that the resident finds life difficult but is determined to keep going; the resident insists on walking even though that is extremely difficult for her and believes that staff must not let her 'give in'. The care assistant also knows that the resident usually starts the day by turning on her radio and that, by chance, bacon is her favourite breakfast. The worker's action may be spontaneous but results from intimate knowledge of the resident and the resident's wishes for her life.

Caring and warmth are essentials for residential work but on their own are not enough, a belief expressed clearly by Bettelheim in his book *Love is not Enough*. Thinking about practice also offers the opportunity for explaining the reasons for actions to others and for evaluating their effectiveness. There is sometimes a belief that residential workers are born, not made, and therefore perform naturally. No doubt any good worker has inherent qualities but skills can be both learnt and taught. Few children can be expected to learn the piano simply from watching a skilled pianist. Indeed it can be very frustrating for a pupil struggling to master a skill to have a teacher who does nothing but demonstrate how easy it should be. To help others learn the teacher has to analyse the