

## ***Providing a containing space for unbearable feelings***

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When psychologists work in situations of extreme deprivation, they may feel a pressure – both internal and external – to produce solutions for their clients, and to produce them quickly. If clients are to be given the best of what psychological help has to offer, though, more space needs to be given to thinking and reflecting, and not just to action. Understanding and working with resistance is central in this process.

In this chapter, I discuss the resistance to a training intervention in a home for abandoned children. I illustrate how the resistance related to defences which were developed to protect the staff against the painful feelings they experienced while working with the abandoned children. There was no container which could facilitate the conscious processing of these feelings. As a result, practices were developed which ensured the denial of the anger, sadness and anxiety inevitably felt by both children and staff.

These defensive practices will be elucidated, and the process of creating a container for the feelings through the establishment of a staff support group will be discussed. The containment led to feelings becoming more bearable, which enabled the staff to focus more effectively on the needs of the children, and to be receptive to in-service training. The role and importance of supervision and theory as containment for the consultation team will be emphasised.