These are trying times, to put it mildly. The events of the last week – overt racism, injustice, public violence and looting – are the insult to the injury that COVID-19 has wreaked on our society. What we see on our social media feeds and televisions adds to the stress that we have endured for the last several months. I am not qualified to discuss the extent of the systemic racism that is at the root of our current unrest. I am not well versed in the statistics about the number of abusive or racist police officers, compared to the selfless servants who put their own lives in harm’s way for the benefit of their communities. What I do feel qualified to comment on, however, is the stress that all of this puts on our children.

Children in the United States are dealing with school building closures, new learning environments, isolation from friends, and possible separation from grandparents because of COVID-19. For more than 30% of military children annually, the stressors can be exacerbated by a summer move and transition to a new school system. And now they are witnessing a dramatically increased level of unrest and discord. It is upsetting for adults and has the potential to be traumatizing for children.

The Military Child Education Coalition® (MCEC) works routinely to ease the transitions of military students throughout their parents’ military careers. It is a mission we have embraced for more than twenty years. This year, however, is different. We are working with educators, parents, and students to ease transitions in an uncharted environment. I do not know of anyone who has experience with moving to a new school and a new home in the midst of a pandemic and clear racial strife. What I do know is that if anyone can thrive on these terms, it is military children.

Our military kids learn how to walk into any situation and strike up a conversation. They master the conversational tact of determining where their lives intersect with others. One of the key principles in the MCEC Student to Student® peer-support program is “100% acceptance,” a principle that seems particularly applicable in these times. Military children are persistent optimists, having learned from an early age that change (and possible improvement) is just around the corner. Experience tells them that even when things get worse, most situations are temporary. They manage this with the assistance of caring, responsible adults. Adults who talk honestly with children about their experiences and what they see can help them to develop adaptive, positive coping skills. Validating the emotions they are experiencing and assisting them to work through those emotions will contribute to further develop the resilience we see in military kids.

I pray that the current unrest is temporary and ushers in a time of predictability, improved relations, and the demise of systemic racism. For military children – no matter their race – we know that their burnished resilience and guidance from caring adults will shepherd them through it. And that’s something from which we can all learn.