

## Youth Hunter Education Challenge for beginners!

Welcome to YHEC. YHEC is an NRA sponsored program for youth 18 years old and younger who have passed hunters education. In YHEC you put to use the skills you have learned in hunters education by practicing 8 different disciplines. YHEC is for beginners and experts. It is for boys and girls. And most importantly YHEC is FUN!!!

In YHEC you practice 8 hunting related skills and then compete in a Utah state competition typically held at the end of April. Those who compete in the state competition have an opportunity to compete in a National or Regional YHEC competition if they would like to. The state of Utah has consistently placed in the top 5 in the country and has produced several national champions.

To be successful in YHEC there are a couple of things you need to know. The kids who are the most successful have 2 things in common. First, their parents are actively involved in YHEC. And second the longer they participate in the program the better they do. YHEC is a competition but it doesn't have to be approached as a competition. It can be taken as seriously or as casually as a participant wants. The equipment a participant uses can make a big difference in your child's ability to be competitive, if that is their desire. Remember YHEC is supposed to be fun.

First lets talk about the parents. YHEC practice is held at different times and places depending on the teams and location. Some areas in the State of Utah have strong teams. Other areas don't have teams. You can practice alone or with others. Parents typically act as the coaches. All "coaches" are volunteers and as such we simply won't tolerate misbehavior. Hunting and handling firearms is serious business and there is no room for horseplay and safety hazards. Don't let this scare you away. As a parent you don't have to be an expert hunter. In fact you don't have to be a hunter at all. You simply need to spend time with you child. We encourage your participation. We are always in need of parents to help coach and help with safety related issues. Please, please, please step forward and help anywhere you can.

Kids can start participating in YHEC as soon as they complete hunter's education. We have kids from 7 – 18 years old competing. The longer a kid competes and practices the better they do. The kids who do the best overall are well rounded in all 8 events. Some kids choose to participate in only 1 or

2 events. This is OK but we really like to see well-rounded competitors who compete in all 8 events. The kids that do the best in YHEC practice and compete in all 8 events. And the longer you practice something the better you become.

Lastly let us explain the 8 different events and the equipment requirements for the events. Gathering the equipment can be costly and can take a number of years to accumulate. Please don't let this discourage you. There is typically some equipment available to use and borrow during practice. Kids can share equipment. And many participants are happy to lend out equipment as well. You can borrow equipment from family and friends. YHEC even has fundraisers that allow kids to earn money to buy their equipment. Again, please, please, please don't let the cost and time to gather equipment discourage you. Simply bring what you can and participate in the events you can. Over time you will get what you need. It may take a couple of years, but that's OK. Many of the kids buy their own equipment over time. Give a kid something to work for, especially if it's something they want, and they can usually figure out a way to get what they want.

Here are the 8 events in no particular order. First is the .22lr rifle event. Every kid loves shooting guns. And there is no better place to start than with a .22 rifle. There are a couple of restrictions on the rifles, but in general any .22lr rifle will work. If at all possible have a scope on your rifle. Scopes are much more accurate for precision shooting. Make sure the rifle is the right size for the shooter. It is very difficult for a small kid to shoot a big rifle well. Eye and ear protection are ALWAYS mandatory. Please supply your own ammunition. Also a bag to carry the rifle in is recommended. If you have questions on a good rifle, just see what the other kids are shooting and ask the other parents some questions. You don't need to run out and buy a new rifle. Just start with what you have. But when it comes time to buy a high-quality rifle ask for some recommendations from the experienced shooters. Having a good rifle and scope will make a huge difference.

The muzzleloader event is a blast for the kids. Again, about any muzzleloader will work. Most of the kids shoot a .50 caliber muzzleloader which is by far the most common. Scopes are NOT allowed. You don't need an expensive muzzleloader. You can buy a cheap gun and starter kit for around \$200 and have everything you need to start. We have found that the biggest key to being successful is the ammunition. You can not use jacketed sabots or any type of jacketed ammunition. Ammunition must be lead only.

Sabots work best and are most accurate. Most of the kids practice with the cheap round lead balls as they are less expensive to shoot. But if you want to get good you will have to spend some time finding good ammunition that meet YHEC's requirements.

The archery event is always fun. A compound bow is definitely the way to go. However any bow will work. Make sure the bow is fit to the shooter and sighted in. Like the .22 rifle when it comes time to buy a bow ask the parents and kids what they like. To get setup correctly it will probably cost about \$500 to buy a bow, arrows, quiver, case and release. Many less expensive deals can be found online and in the classifieds. Bring what you have and go from there! Don't feel like you need to rush out and buy everything at once. Over time you will get all the gear you need.

The shotgun event is the last shooting event. The key here is to have a gun that fits the shooter. We see a lot of kids show up with a shotgun that is simply way too big for them to handle safely or accurately. Many kids don't mind lending their shotguns to their friends. We have kids shooting all brands, gauges, and types of shotguns. Just bring what you have and we will go from there. Bring your own ammunition. The cheap stuff is the best. Typically 8 shot target loads are best for breaking clay pigeons. Most kids will have a modified or improved choke in their shotguns. A shooting vest or shooting bag to hold shotgun shells helps a bunch. The kids will shoot 30 shells and they need something other than pants pockets to hold those shotgun shells. Eye and ear protection are required! Just bring what you have and learn as you go.

Orienteering is one of the most challenging events. All you need for this event is a good compass. We recommend the Silva Explorer or something similar. You don't need a fancy compass to do well. But you do need an accurate one. Don't go buy a cheap \$5 WalMart special. Spend a couple extra dollars for a good quality compass. Bring a notebook also. The BSA orienteering merit badge is a good place to start. There are lots of free online resources as well to help kids learn map and compass skills.

Wildlife Identification tests kids ability to identify different kinds of wildlife. There is no equipment requirement for this event. All YHEC participants will be given a book to study from that has a lot of information in it. Any wildlife or birding book can be studied from. Most of the wildlife that the kids will learn to identify is wildlife they can hunt. So being able to

identify a robin won't help much. But being able to tell the difference between a deer and an elk is a must. The best competitors at this event practice year round every time they see wildlife. When you see wildlife ask your kids to identify it. We learn to identify animals by sight, sound, tracks and even poop!

The safety trail tests kids ability to be safe in the field. In this event your child will "pretend" to hunt. They will use an unloaded firearm and be placed in situations common to hunting and see if they can navigate the scenarios safely. There is no equipment requirement for this event. However during the state and international competition an orange safety vest and firearm will be required but is usually supplied as part of the event.

And last but certainly not least is the written test. The written test is the most important event. It is the tie-breaker on all other events. And ties are common. The book referenced earlier is the text from which all questions are generated. The written test will test kids knowledge of all aspects of hunting. We have practice questions and quizzes every week as part of practice. It will be required that all participants take the practice tests BEFORE they can participate in the shooting and other events. There are online study tests and quizzes and lots of resouces for kids that want to practice. Over half of the points available in the competition have nothing to do with shooting.

Kids will compete in all 8 events and receive a score in each event. The scores are then added and the participant with the highest cumulative score wins. If you have questions please contact us. We would love to help you get a team setup in your area.