

PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

Family Law in Adams County

A plain-English map for divorce, dissolution, custody, support, and adoption in West Union and across Adams County: which division handles your case, what to file, what it costs, and when to get help.

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- 01** Adams County runs one Court of Common Pleas for all family law. See how that shapes your case.

 - 02** Know the difference between dissolution, divorce, juvenile custody, and probate adoption.

 - 03** Find the right form, the deposit, and the local rules that trip people up.

 - 04** Pick a next step that fits your budget, your timeline, and how much conflict there is.

START HERE

Use this guide like a map, not a rulebook.

Family law gets easier once you name a few things: the court, the path, the paperwork, and your next step. This guide is built on those questions for Adams County.

01

Which division handles this?

Adams County has one Court of Common Pleas. The Domestic Relations Division hears divorce and dissolution. Juvenile handles custody and support for parents who were never married. Probate handles adoption.

02

Do we agree, or is there a fight?

Agreement changes everything. Dissolution and uncontested filings run on signed paperwork. If someone disagrees, misses deadlines, or safety is a worry, plan for a more protective path.

03

What should I gather first?

Gather any current orders and your income records. Add insurance details, the kids' birth certificates, school and parenting-time notes, and a short list of what you want the court to decide.

THIS GUIDE IS INFORMATION, NOT LEGAL ADVICE

It explains how things usually work in Adams County. It cannot cover the facts of your case. Reading it, downloading it, or contacting Gavvl Law does not make you a client. Only a signed engagement agreement does that. For advice about your own case, talk with a licensed Ohio attorney.

BEFORE YOU FILE

Adams County uses its own local forms, marked AC, alongside the Ohio Supreme Court forms, marked SC. Pro se filers must use the right ones, and incomplete filings can be rejected. There is no e-filing yet, so plan to file on paper.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Four parts: Domestic Relations (divorce and dissolution), Juvenile Court (unmarried parents), Probate (adoption), and how Gavvl can help. The full contents are on the next page.

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QUESTION ONE

Which division is actually handling your case?

One family can touch more than one division. Adams County is unusual: a single judge hears every family-law division. Start with the relationship, and with the decision you need a judge to make.

MARRIED OR FORMERLY MARRIED

Domestic Relations

Divorce, dissolution, legal separation, annulment, spousal support, and dividing property and debt.

WHO HEARS IT

Judge Brett M. Spencer;
Magistrate David M. Hunter.

PARENTS NEVER MARRIED

Juvenile Division

Custody, parenting time, parentage, and child support for unmarried parents. Also abuse, neglect, and dependency.

WHO HEARS IT

The same judge and magistrate.

ADOPTION

Probate Division

Stepparent, kinship, and adult adoption, plus name changes tied to adoption.

WHO HEARS IT

The same judge — but adoption needs a lawyer (see Part 3).

One court, one building

All three divisions sit in the Adams County Court of Common Pleas at 110 West Main Street in West Union. A different court, the Adams County Court, handles small claims, evictions, and traffic — not family law. Each family-law division uses different forms and deposits, so sort out which one fits before you build your packet.

PART ONE

The Domestic Relations Division ends marriages.

If you are married, ending the marriage runs through the Domestic Relations Division. The first real question is simple: can both spouses sign a full agreement?

WHERE YOU FILE	WITHOUT CHILDREN	WITH CHILDREN	HEARING WINDOW
Clerk of Courts	\$300	\$350	30–90 days

QUICK PATHFINDER

Do you agree on everything?

If yes, dissolution may fit. If no, divorce is the safer or required path. Agreement means more than wanting the case over. It means signed terms on property, debt, support, and parenting. Add child support if you have children.

Dissolution is built on agreement.

Both spouses file together. They ask the court to approve a signed Separation Agreement. The court holds a short hearing 30 to 90 days later. Both spouses must appear and confirm the agreement.

Divorce is a lawsuit.

One spouse files against the other. Use it when you do not yet agree. Use it when you cannot find your spouse, or when you need the court to decide something.

THE DEPOSIT DEPENDS ON CHILDREN

Adams County charges a \$300 deposit for a divorce or dissolution without children, and \$350 when there are minor children. The deposit goes toward your real costs. The balance is billed or refunded at the end. You must pay it before the court accepts your filing, unless you qualify for a fee waiver.

DISSOLUTION

The dissolution packet, step by step.

Dissolution mixes Ohio Supreme Court forms (marked SC) with Adams County forms (marked AC). Sign the Separation Agreement in front of a notary first. Then build the rest of the packet around it.

USE THE COUNTY PARENTING PLAN, NOT THE STATE ONE

Adams County says the Supreme Court shared-parenting and parenting-plan forms do not meet its local rules. If you have children, use the county's AC-216 Shared Parenting Plan or AC-217 Parenting Plan instead. Using the wrong plan can stall your case.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
AC-003 Waiver of Service of Summons https://sites.google.com/view/adamscountycommonpleas/home/all-divisions	Forms portal (AC)	Both spouses sign; replaces formal service
SC-17 Petition for Dissolution https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Opens the joint case; both spouses sign
SC-19 Separation Agreement https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Your signed terms; notarize this first
Affidavit 1 — Income & Expenses https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Required; cannot be waived with children
Affidavit 2 — Property https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Or AC-201 waiver, signed by both spouses
AC-216 Shared Parenting Plan https://sites.google.com/view/adamscountycommonpleas/home/all-divisions	Forms portal (AC)	With children; AC-217 if not shared parenting
AC-006 Waiver of Magistrate's Decision https://sites.google.com/view/adamscountycommonpleas/home/all-divisions	Forms portal (AC)	Bring to the final hearing, not filed first

WITH CHILDREN**More forms apply**

Add the Parenting Proceeding and Health Insurance affidavits, the county parenting documents, a child support worksheet, the AC-202 CSEA setup sheet, and the JFS 07076 support application. Both spouses take the parenting class.

EVERY PRO SE DISSOLUTION GETS A REVIEW

Adams County sets every self-filed dissolution for a pretrial or compliance hearing. The court reviews the paperwork and checks that the parenting class is done. It suggests at least one spouse talk with an attorney first.

DIVORCE

Filing a divorce when you do not agree.

Divorce is filed with the Clerk of Courts on paper. Adams County mixes its AC forms with the SC standard forms. The required affidavits go in with the Complaint.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
AC-001 Notice of Appearance https://sites.google.com/view/adamscountycommonpleas/home/all-divisions	Forms portal (AC)	Every party files one
SC Form 6 or 7 — Complaint for Divorce https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Form 7 if you have children; Form 6 if not
Affidavit 1 — Income & Expenses https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Notarized; filed with the Complaint
Affidavit 2 — Property https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Notarized; filed with the Complaint
Affidavits 3 & 4 — Parenting and Insurance https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; notarized
AC-005 Praecipe for Service https://sites.google.com/view/adamscountycommonpleas/home/all-divisions	Forms portal (AC)	Tells the Clerk how to serve your spouse

With children, more is required

A divorce with children adds the county parenting documents (AC-216 or AC-217, AC-206, AC-207), a signed child support worksheet, the AC-202 CSEA setup, and the parenting class. A divorce without children skips all of that.

WANT ORDERS DURING THE CASE?

To set temporary support or parenting orders while the divorce is pending, file SC Affidavit 5, the Motion and Affidavit for Temporary Orders. It is optional, but it is how you ask the court to act before the final hearing.

TEMPORARY ORDERS

Getting orders while the case runs.

A divorce can take months. Temporary orders set the rules in the meantime — things like temporary support or who stays in the home.

How it works here

In a divorce, you ask for temporary orders by filing SC Affidavit 5, the Motion and Affidavit for Temporary Orders. It is not required, but file it if you want support or parenting orders in place during the case. A hearing may be set.

Emergency custody is different

Adams County generally will not grant a motion for an emergency custody hearing in a juvenile case. If a child is at risk, the path is through Children Services, not an emergency motion.

CONFIRM WITH THE COURT

We could not confirm a set deadline to respond to a temporary-orders request, or how soon the hearing is held. Ask the Clerk of Courts at (937) 544-2921 how temporary motions are scheduled. If you are worried about a child's safety, contact Adams County Children Services at (937) 544-2511. If anyone is in danger right now, call 911.

CHILDREN

Custody, parenting time, and child support in a divorce.

Ohio uses specific words for custody. The right words help you read the forms and talk to the court.

SOLE CUSTODY

Residential parent and legal custodian

One parent is the residential parent and legal custodian. The other parent usually has parenting time. Ohio does not use the words “full” or “primary” custody.

SHARED PARENTING

A shared parenting plan

Both parents share rights and duties under a written plan. Shared parenting is not the same as equal time. The schedule is whatever the plan or order says.

The parenting class is required

In any case with minor children, the parents take an online class called Helping Children Cope With Family Separation, run through Beech Acres (Local Rule 213). You register with Beech Acres, not the court. The class need only be done once.

CHILD SUPPORT RUNS THROUGH THE CSEA

The Adams County Child Support Enforcement Agency handles support. It is at 482 Rice Drive, (937) 544-5155. Every case with children needs the AC-202 CSEA setup sheet, even if no support is requested.

THE REST OF A DIVORCE

Spousal support, property, and other paths.

Beyond custody and child support, a divorce sorts out spousal support and divides what you own and owe.

Spousal support

The court can order one spouse to support the other for a set time. Ohio weighs income, the length of the marriage, health, and other factors. There is no fixed formula.

Property and debt

Ohio divides marital property and debt fairly. Fair does not always mean a 50-50 split. Property you brought into the marriage may count as separate.

Legal separation and annulment

Both are filed in the Domestic Relations Division. The deposit follows the same with- and without-children tiers as a divorce.

A note on annulment

Annulment is a court ruling that a marriage was never valid, on narrow legal grounds. It is rarely the right tool, and it is not a faster divorce. If you are unsure whether your situation fits, talk with an attorney before you file.

AFTER THE DECREE

Changing or enforcing an Adams County order.

Life changes after a case ends. Post-decree motions stay in the same Domestic Relations case that issued your decree.

POST-DECREE MOTION**\$100**

To modify custody, parenting time, or support after the decree

CONTEMPT**\$100**

To enforce an order that is not being followed; uses SC Form 24 and a Show Cause Order

FOREIGN SHERIFF SERVICE**\$40**

Deposit when the other party must be served outside Ohio

Changing custody or support

Use SC Form 27 to change custody, with the Parenting Proceeding affidavit and the county parenting documents. Support changes can also start through the CSEA. The parenting class does not apply to contempt cases.

MOVING WITH THE CHILDREN

A parent who plans to relocate must follow the court's relocation process before moving. The portal has a dedicated relocation page. Ask the Clerk which forms apply to your decree.

HELP ALONG THE WAY

Mediation, investigations, GALs, and CASA.

Adams County offers ways to settle disputes. It also offers ways to give the court good information about the children.

Mediation

The court can send a case to mediation with an approved mediator (Local Rule 006). Each party sends a confidential statement seven days ahead. A \$50 mediation fund fee is added to civil and juvenile filings.

GAL and CASA

The court can appoint a guardian ad litem or a CASA volunteer to speak to the children's best interests. The GAL deposit is \$750, and fees can run higher. Reach Adams County CASA at (937) 618-0189.

Custody investigations

In a contested custody case where both parents live in Adams County, the court can order an investigation. The deposit is \$500, set by AC-205 Miscellaneous Motion.

NOT SURE WHERE TO START?

Two minutes to a clear next step.

Gavvl's Find My Service quiz gives you a recommendation and your payment options. Or talk with our team about full or limited-scope help in Adams County.

Find My Service · gavvl.com/find-my-service

Get started · gavvl.com/start

Call · (844) 694-2885

Email · support@gavvl.com

PROTECTION ORDERS

When safety comes first.

A domestic violence civil protection order (DVCPO) can order someone to stay away. Your safety drives the timeline.

FILING FEE	FILING HOURS	HEARD BY	FORMS
\$0 to petitioner	8 a.m.–2:30 p.m.	Magistrate Hunter	Ohio standard set

How it works here

DVCPO petitions are filed in the Domestic Relations Division under R.C. 3113.31. There is no filing fee. The Clerk takes petitions only between 8 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. on court days; later ones may wait until the next court day. A victim advocate is present at every hearing.

What an ex parte order will and won't do

The court can issue a same-day ex parte order for safety. But it generally will not set parenting time or child support in that first order. If a child is at risk, the court refers the matter to Children Services.

IF YOU ARE IN DANGER NOW

If you or your children are in danger right now, call 911. A protection order is a civil court process, not an emergency response.

PART TWO

Juvenile Court is for parents who were never married.

Were the parents never married to each other? Then custody, parenting time, parentage, and child support are decided in the Juvenile Division.

Two Adams County rules to know
 First, file a separate case for each child. Second, if there is no case yet for that child, file a complaint to start one. If a case already exists, file a motion instead. Getting this right keeps your filing from being bounced.

Filing for custody as an unmarried parent

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
SC Form 23 — Complaint for Parentage and Custody https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Starts a new case; SC Form 27 to change one
AC-007 Authorization for Background Search https://sites.google.com/view/adamscountycommonpleas/home/all-divisions	Forms portal (AC)	One for each household member over 18
Affidavits 1, 3 & 4 https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Income, parenting proceeding, and insurance
AC-202 CSEA Account Setup Sheet https://sites.google.com/view/adamscountycommonpleas/home/all-divisions	Forms portal (AC)	Required in every case with children

BRING WITH YOU

Bring a certified copy of each child's birth certificate, plus a sheriff's background check for each adult in the home. Juvenile court costs are lower here: a new filing is \$125, a custody, visitation, or parentage case is \$105, and an unmarried-mother custody order is \$50. Pay by cash, money order, or card — no personal checks.

PARENTING TIME

Setting a parenting-time schedule.

Parenting time is the schedule each parent has with the children. Adams County uses standard parenting documents so orders are clear and consistent.

STANDARD ORDERS

AC-206

The county's Standard Parenting Orders set the ground rules that apply to most cases. They attach to a parenting plan or an agreement.

STANDARD SCHEDULE

AC-207

The Standard Parenting Schedule fills in the calendar when parents do not have their own agreed schedule. Parents can always agree to more time.

GRANDPARENTS

Companionship

Grandparents and certain relatives can ask for court-ordered time using AC-304. The court decides based on the child's best interest.

Changing a schedule

To change parenting time later, you file a motion in the existing case, not a new complaint. The portal has a dedicated Change in Parenting Time page with the forms.

CONFIRM THE SCHEDULE DETAILS

The exact day-to-day schedule lives in the AC-207 form, which we did not reproduce here. Pull the current AC-207 from the county forms portal so you have the right version.

AFTER A JUVENILE ORDER

Changing orders, emergencies, and CPS cases.

Juvenile orders can change as children grow. Some cases move fast, and Adams County handles emergencies in a specific way.

Emergency custody, the Adams County way
Adams County generally will not grant a motion for an emergency custody hearing. If you are worried about a child's safety, the path is Adams County Children Services at (937) 544-2511. For immediate danger, call 911.

Abuse, neglect, and dependency
These CPS cases are heard in the Juvenile Division. The court appoints a guardian ad litem or CASA for the children. Low-income parents may ask for an appointed lawyer.

CONFIRM WITH THE COURT

Registering an out-of-state custody or support order has no posted step-by-step process here. Ask the Clerk of Courts at (937) 544-2921 how registration works and what deposit applies before you file.

PART THREE

Adoption is handled by the Probate Division.

Stepparent and kinship adoptions are filed in the Probate Division. Adams County has one firm rule that sets it apart: you must have a lawyer.

ADOPTIONS REQUIRE AN ATTORNEY

Under Local Rule 408, Adams County does not accept pro se adoption filings. A licensed attorney must prepare the petition, the notices, and the entries. This is the single most important thing to know before you start an adoption here.

ADOPTION COURT COSTS

\$150

Per child, for private, agency, or preplacement; adult adoption is also \$150

ASSESSOR HOME STUDY

\$500

Per household, paid directly to the assessor

REGISTER A FOREIGN ADOPTION

\$50

New birth certificate fee is about \$21.50

1

Hire an attorney and file the petition

Your attorney files the Petition for Adoption (Supreme Court Form 18.0) with a signed Court Adoption Checklist. The Probate Court is at 110 West Main Street, (937) 544-2921.

2

Give notice to birth parents

Counsel serves each birth parent with the Notice to Birth Parent (AC-437). A parent can object within 14 days if the child is under one year old, or 28 days if the child is older.

3

Complete any required training or assessment

Except in stepparent cases, petitioners complete pre-service training and a home study through Children Services before filing. Stepparents are exempt from that training.

4

Attend the hearing

Adoption hearings are closed and the records are sealed. If the court approves, it issues a final decree, and a new birth certificate can follow.

PART FOUR

How Gavvl Law can help in Adams County.

Gavvl is a modern Ohio family-law firm serving all 88 counties. We pair skilled lawyers with easy-to-use tech and clear pricing. You choose how much help you need.

FULL REPRESENTATION

An attorney handles the whole case

From the first consult through final orders: strategy, every filing, all court dates, and negotiating. Best for contested, complex, or high-conflict cases, and required for adoptions here. Billed as a retainer plus hourly fees.

LIMITED-SCOPE (FLAT FEE)

Hire us for specific tasks

Pay a flat fee per service — drafting and filing, one hearing, advice, or document review. Best for uncontested cases and tighter budgets. Not built for high-conflict cases that need steady advocacy.

Ways to pay

Your options depend on the service model. Limited-scope work has the widest range: pay in full, Affirm, Klarna, or PayPal Pay Later. Gavvl Direct is an in-house plan with no credit check. Financed amounts carry 19% annual interest, compounded monthly. We work out your exact payment when you enroll.

START IN TWO MINUTES

Take the Find My Service quiz at gavvl.com/find-my-service. You get a recommendation and your payment options. Or call (844) 694-2885. Consultations are low-cost.

BEFORE YOU GO

Important disclosures.

Please read these notes about how to use this guide.

INFORMATION, NOT LEGAL ADVICE

This guide explains how things generally work in Adams County, but it cannot account for the facts of your case. Reading it, downloading it, or contacting Gavvl Law does not make you a client or create an attorney-client relationship. Only a signed engagement agreement does that. For advice about your own situation, talk with a licensed Ohio attorney.

FEES AND PROCEDURES CHANGE

The court information in this guide was verified as of June 10, 2026 from official court sources. Court fees, forms, and procedures change. Always confirm current fees and requirements with the Adams County Clerk of Courts before you file.

AWARDS AND REVIEWS

Any awards, ratings, and reviews reflect the experiences of other clients and the opinions of rating organizations. They are not a guarantee or prediction of the outcome of your case. Every case is different.

JURISDICTION AND RESPONSIBILITY

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