

PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

Family Law in Ashtabula County

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

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- 01** Ashtabula County splits family law across three offices. See which one hears 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 Ashtabula County.

01

Which office handles this?

The Common Pleas General and Domestic Relations Division in Jefferson hears divorce and dissolution. The Juvenile Division in Ashtabula handles custody when parents were not married. Probate, back in Jefferson, handles adoption.

THIS GUIDE IS INFORMATION, NOT LEGAL ADVICE

It explains how things usually work in Ashtabula 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.

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.

NO E-FILING YET

Ashtabula has not turned on e-filing. File divorce cases by fax, mail, or in person with the Clerk in Jefferson. The Juvenile Division also accepts filings by email. Check the deposit and forms before you file.

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.

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.

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

Use this guide like a map, not a rulebook.	2
Which office is actually handling your case?	4
The Domestic Relations Division ends marriages.	5
The dissolution packet, step by step.	6
Filing a divorce when you do not agree.	8
Getting support or other orders while the case runs.	9
Custody, parenting time, and child support in a divorce.	10
Spousal support, property, and other paths.	11
Changing or enforcing an Ashtabula County order.	12
Mediation, investigations, and GALs.	13
When safety comes first.	14
Juvenile Court is for parents who were never married.	15
Filing for custody as an unmarried parent	15
Changing orders, relocation, and CPS cases.	16
Adoption is handled by the Probate Division.	17
How Gavvl Law can help in Ashtabula County.	18
Important disclosures.	19

QUESTION ONE

Which office is actually handling your case?

One family can touch more than one office. Ashtabula County is unusual: the Juvenile and Probate Divisions share one judge but sit in two towns. Start with the relationship, and with what you need a judge to decide.

MARRIED OR FORMERLY MARRIED

General & DR Division

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

WHERE

25 West Jefferson Street, Jefferson. Judges Schroeder and Sezon.

PARENTS NEVER MARRIED

Juvenile Division

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

WHERE

4717 Main Avenue, Ashtabula. Judge Camplese.

ADOPTION

Probate Division

Stepparent, kinship, and adult adoption, plus marriage licenses.

WHERE

25 West Jefferson Street, Jefferson. Judge Camplese, same as Juvenile.

Two towns, one judge for two divisions

The Juvenile Division sits in Ashtabula. The Probate Division sits in Jefferson. But both answer to the same judge. The divorce court is a separate court in Jefferson. Each office keeps its own forms, fees, and clerk, so file with the right one.

PART ONE

The Domestic Relations Division ends marriages.

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

WHERE YOU FILE	WITHOUT CHILDREN	WITH CHILDREN	RESIDENCY
Clerk in Jefferson	\$270	\$385	6 months in Ohio

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 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

Ashtabula charges \$270 for a divorce, dissolution, or legal separation without children, and \$385 when there are minor children. The deposit goes toward your real costs. The balance is billed or refunded at the end. You must live in Ohio six months before filing.

DISSOLUTION

The dissolution packet, step by step.

Dissolution uses the Ohio Supreme Court forms plus two short local forms. Sign the Separation Agreement in front of a notary first. Then build the rest of the packet around it.

BOTH OF YOU MUST SHOW UP

A dissolution is fully agreed. You file together, and the court sets a hearing 30 to 90 days out. Both spouses must appear and confirm that the agreement is voluntary and complete. If you do not agree on everything, you need a divorce instead.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Petition for Dissolution https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Both spouses sign; opens the joint case
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 2 — Property & Debt https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Lists what you own and owe
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
Parenting plan and support worksheet https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; the agreed schedule and support math
Filing Designation + Confidentiality forms https://courts.ashtabulacounty.gov/courts_forms.htm	Clerk forms (local)	Local cover sheets filed with the petition

WITH CHILDREN**Parent class applies**

If you have children, the Clerk mails both spouses an order to take the New Beginnings parenting class within 7 days of filing. You finish it within 60 days, or before the hearing, whichever comes first.

MEDIATION MAY APPLY FIRST

If parenting terms are not fully settled, Family Court Services may run mediation. A signed parenting agreement can support a motion to waive it. Mediation does not begin until both parents finish the parenting class.

DIVORCE

Filing a divorce when you do not agree.

Divorce is filed with the Clerk in Jefferson by fax, mail, or in person. Ashtabula uses the Ohio Supreme Court forms. The financial and parenting affidavits go in with the Complaint.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Complaint for Divorce https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Starts the lawsuit; with or without children
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 & Debt https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Lists what you own and owe
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
Affidavit for Temporary Orders https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	File if you want orders during the case

A restraining order on filing
 When you file for divorce or legal separation, the court may issue a standard mutual restraining order about conduct and assets. The Clerk serves it on the other spouse with the Complaint.

ANSWER AND COUNTERCLAIM
 A spouse who is served can file an Answer, and a Counterclaim if they want their own relief. The deposit for an Answer and Counterclaim is \$75. If no one responds, the case can move ahead by default.

TEMPORARY ORDERS

Getting support or other 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

Under Local Rule 7.2, the court can set temporary support and parenting orders on the affidavits, without an oral hearing (Civ.R. 75(N)). A proposed child support worksheet must come with any support request.

The 14-day and 28-day rules

The other party has 14 days to file a counter-affidavit. Either party can request an oral hearing to change a temporary order within 28 days. Asking for a hearing does not pause payments already ordered.

ASKING A SPOUSE TO LEAVE THE HOME

A Motion for Exclusive Use of Premises can be granted on documented domestic violence, or where the other spouse has been gone from the home for more than 30 days in a row, for reasons other than work. By the temporary-support hearing, each party exchanges a pay stub, three years of tax returns, and a list of expenses. 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 New Beginnings class

In any divorce, dissolution, or legal separation with children, both parents take the court's New Beginnings class. It runs about three hours and is offered online through Family Court Services (Local Rule 7.11). Finish it within 60 days.

CONFIRM THE CLASS COST

The local rules set up the New Beginnings class but do not list its cost or a registration link. Ask Family Court Services, through the Juvenile Court at (440) 994-6000, for the current fee and how to sign up.

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. Legal separation uses the same deposit tiers as a divorce. Annulment is rare and has narrow grounds.

A note on investigations

In a contested custody case, the court can order a custody investigation through Family Court Services. A full investigation is \$300, and a partial one is \$150. The report gives the court an outside look at each home before it decides parenting.

AFTER THE DECREE

Changing or enforcing an Ashtabula County order.

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

POST-JUDGMENT MOTION**\$100**

To reopen the case and modify custody, parenting time, or support

REGISTER A FOREIGN DECREE**\$150**

To bring an out-of-state divorce order into Ashtabula County

TRANSFER FROM JUVENILE**\$150**

When a juvenile custody case moves into the divorce case

Modifying and enforcing

To change custody or support, you file a post-judgment motion in your original case. Support enforcement can also run through the child support agency. Post-decree emergency orders about children are granted only for real, lasting harm.

MOVING WITH THE CHILDREN

A parent who plans to move should follow Ohio's relocation notice rules before moving. Ask the Clerk's Legal Division at (440) 576-3637 which form your decree needs and how far ahead to file it.

HELP ALONG THE WAY

Mediation, investigations, and GALs.

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

Mediation

Family Court Services runs mediation for divorce and juvenile cases. The court can order it in a parenting dispute. The mediation fee is \$150, added as court costs. Mediation is never used to decide a protection order.

Guardians ad litem

The court can appoint a guardian ad litem to speak to the children's best interests. The rate is \$150 an hour, with a \$2,000 initial deposit split between the parties.

Home studies

Family Court Services also handles court-ordered home studies and investigations for both the divorce court and the Juvenile Court, so one program serves all three offices.

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 Ashtabula 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. It can also set temporary custody and support. Your safety drives the timeline.

FILING FEE	EX PARTE HEARING	FULL HEARING	FORMS
\$0 to petitioner	Same day	About 7–10 court days	Ohio standard set

How it works here

DVCPO petitions are filed in the General and Domestic Relations Division in Jefferson under R.C. 3113.31. There is no filing fee. A judge or magistrate can issue a same-day ex parte order on your sworn petition, with a full hearing about 7 to 10 court days later.

Filed on paper

Protection-order documents are filed on paper with the Clerk, even when other filings move online later. A final order can last up to five years and can include no contact, stay-away terms, and firearms limits.

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? Then custody, parenting time, and child support are decided in the Juvenile Division in Ashtabula. Judge Camplese hears these cases.

Three ways to establish parentage

Parents can sign a form called an Acknowledgment of Paternity, often at the hospital. The child support agency can also order a DNA test and set paternity on its own. Or a parent can file a court case that settles parentage, custody, and support at once.

Filing for custody as an unmarried parent

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Complaint for Parentage and Custody https://courts.ashtabulacounty.gov/courts_forms.htm	Juvenile Division (local)	Establishes parentage, custody, parenting time
Joint Declaration of Paternity https://courts.ashtabulacounty.gov/courts_forms.htm	Juvenile Division (local)	When both parents agree on parentage
Income & parenting affidavits https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Income, parenting proceeding, and insurance
Child Support Worksheet https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Required when support is at issue

COSTS AND FILING

The Juvenile Division sits at 4717 Main Avenue in Ashtabula, (440) 994-6000, and takes filings by email. A new custody, parenting, or support case costs \$130 to file. Court costs add a bit more, such as \$95 for paternity. Bring a certified copy of the child's birth certificate.

AFTER A JUVENILE ORDER

Changing orders, relocation, and CPS cases.

Juvenile orders can change as children grow. Some cases move fast.

GENERAL MOTION**\$25**

To raise an issue in an existing juvenile case

NOTICE OF RELOCATION**\$25**

When a parent plans to move out of the county

OBJECTIONS**\$50**

To object to a magistrate's decision

Modifying a juvenile order

To change custody, parenting time, or support, you file a motion in the existing case. Support changes can also start through the child support agency. Reach the Ashtabula County CSEA at (440) 994-1212.

Abuse, neglect, and dependency

These CPS cases are heard in the Juvenile Division. The court can appoint a guardian ad litem for the children. Low-income parents may ask for an appointed lawyer.

CONFIRM WITH THE COURT

The steps to register an out-of-state order in the Juvenile Division are not fully published. Ask the Juvenile Court at (440) 994-6000 how registration works and what it costs before you file.

PART THREE

Adoption is handled by the Probate Division.

Stepparent and kinship adoptions go to the Probate Division in Jefferson, before Judge Campese. It shares the judge with Juvenile, but sits in a different town.

MINOR ADOPTION**\$400**

Private or stepparent; agency with a home study is \$200

ADULT ADOPTION**\$100**

Foreign birth record order is \$50

PAYMENT**No checks**

Cash, money order, debit, or credit — no personal checks

1**File the petition in Probate**

File the Petition for Adoption at 25 West Jefferson Street, (440) 576-3451, with the child's birth certificate and your marriage or relationship papers.

2**Address consent**

The other parent's consent is usually needed. The court can waive it if a parent had no contact, or gave no support, for the year before filing.

3**Complete the home study**

The court may order a home study. For stepparent cases it is often shorter and simpler than for other adoptions.

4**Attend the hearing**

If the court says yes, it signs a final decree. A new birth certificate can follow.

PART FOUR

How Gavvl Law can help in Ashtabula 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. 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

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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 Ashtabula County 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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