

## PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

# Family Law in Clark County

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

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- 01** See how Clark County splits family law between an Adult Section and a Juvenile Section.

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

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

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

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## 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 Clark County.

01

## Which court handles this?

Married couples file divorce or dissolution in the Adult Section. Unmarried parents file custody in the Juvenile Section. Adoptions go to the separate Probate Court. Each has its own office in Springfield.

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 Clark 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.

### E-FILING IS NOW AVAILABLE

The Clerk's e-filing system started in January 2026 and replaced fax filing. Filers who cannot pay the fee must file in person or by mail. Check the deposit and forms before you file.

### WHAT'S INSIDE

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

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## QUESTION ONE

# Which court is actually handling your case?

One family can touch more than one court. Clark County splits family law by whether the parents were married. Start with the relationship, and with what you need a judge to decide.

**MARRIED OR FORMERLY MARRIED**

## DR Division — Adult Section

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

**WHERE**

Via the Clerk, 101 N.  
Limestone St., 2nd floor.

**PARENTS NEVER MARRIED**

## DR Division — Juvenile Section

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

**WHERE**

101 E. Columbia St. Judge  
Katrine M. Lancaster.

**ADOPTION**

## Probate Court

Stepparent, kinship, and adult adoption, plus name changes and guardianships.

**WHERE**

50 E. Columbia St., 5th floor.  
Judge Richard P. Carey.

### Two sections, one division

Clark County's Domestic Relations Division has an Adult Section for married couples and a Juvenile Section for unmarried parents. They sit in different buildings in Springfield, and adoption is a third court, Probate. File with the right one for your case.

## PART ONE

# The Adult Section ends marriages.

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

WHERE YOU FILE	DIVORCE	DISSOLUTION	RESIDENCY
Clerk of Courts	\$400	\$350	6 months in Ohio

## QUICK PATHFINDER

## Do you agree on everything?

If yes, dissolution may fit, and it costs a little less. 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.

### 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 DEPOSITS

A divorce, legal separation, or annulment costs \$400. A dissolution costs \$350. The deposit goes toward your real costs, and the balance is refunded after the final hearing to the person who paid it. One spouse must have lived in Ohio six months.

## DISSOLUTION

# The dissolution packet, step by step.

Dissolution uses the Ohio Supreme Court forms. Sign the Separation Agreement in front of a notary or two witnesses 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 affirm the agreement. You get a final-hearing date from the Assignment Secretary when you file.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="#">Petition for Dissolution</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1</a>	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Both spouses sign; opens the joint case
<a href="#">Separation Agreement</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1</a>	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Your signed terms; notarize this first
<a href="#">Financial Disclosure Form</a> <a href="https://www.clarkcountyohio.gov/93/Clerk-of-Courts">https://www.clarkcountyohio.gov/93/Clerk-of-Courts</a>	Clark County Clerk	Notarized; each petitioner files one
<a href="#">Child support worksheet</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1</a>	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; the support math
<a href="#">Title IV-D application</a> <a href="https://www.clarkcountyohio.gov/93/Clerk-of-Courts">https://www.clarkcountyohio.gov/93/Clerk-of-Courts</a>	Clark County Clerk	When a support order is sought
<a href="#">Judgment Entry of Dissolution</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1</a>	Ohio Supreme Court forms	The decree the court signs

**COST****\$350 deposit**

A dissolution costs \$350, payable by cash, money order, or card. The deposit goes toward court costs, and the balance is refunded after the hearing to the person who posted it.

**ON PARENTING CLASSES**

Clark County does not require a parenting class in every case. The court can order one in a contested custody fight. Ask the court whether your case will need one, and which program it accepts.

DIVORCE

# Filing a divorce when you do not agree.

Divorce is filed with the Clerk of Courts and heard by the Adult Section. Clark uses the Ohio Supreme Court forms. The financial affidavits go in with the Complaint.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="#">Complaint for Divorce</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1</a>	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Starts the lawsuit; with or without children
<a href="#">Financial Disclosure Form</a> <a href="https://www.clarkcountyohio.gov/93/Clerk-of-Courts">https://www.clarkcountyohio.gov/93/Clerk-of-Courts</a>	Clark County Clerk	Notarized; filed with the Complaint
<a href="#">Parenting affidavits</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1</a>	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; parenting and insurance
<a href="#">Child support worksheet</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1</a>	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; the support math
<a href="#">Motion for Temporary Orders</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1</a>	Ohio Supreme Court forms	File if you want orders during the case

**Want orders during the case?**  
 File a motion for temporary orders, with an affidavit, in your pending case. A magistrate hears it. You get a hearing date from the Assignment Secretary. See the next page for the timing.

**IF YOU CANNOT FIND YOUR SPOUSE**  
 Service can be by publication if you cannot find the other spouse. You file an extra service request, and the court arranges the notice. Ask the Clerk at (937) 521-1680 about the steps.

## 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.

## Heard within about 14 days

You file a motion for temporary orders with an affidavit. A magistrate hears it, and the court makes every effort to hold that hearing within 14 days of your request. The order takes effect when it is filed.

## Emergency orders

A judge or magistrate can sign an ex parte order in a real emergency. It is limited to three things: stopping family violence, keeping the children in Ohio, and stopping a spouse from hiding or wasting assets.

## ASKING A SPOUSE TO LEAVE THE HOME

The court can order a spouse out of the home after a showing of violence, threats, child abuse, or other good cause, or when a spouse has been voluntarily gone for more than 30 days. If you were never married, emergency custody goes to the Juvenile Section. 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.

## Parenting classes here

Clark County does not order a parenting class in every case. Under its rules, the court can order both parents in a contested custody fight to take a parent-education program. The specific class is set by the court, so confirm what yours needs.

**CHILD SUPPORT RUNS THROUGH THE CSEA**

The Clark County child support agency handles support. Reach it at (937) 327-1700. Support is collected by income withholding, and paid through the state, not directly between parents.

## 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 Adult Section. The deposit is the same \$400 as a divorce. Annulment is rare and has narrow grounds.

### A note on automatic restraining orders

In a divorce, either party can ask the court for an ex parte restraining order. Clark County allows three kinds: stopping family violence, keeping the children in Ohio, and stopping a spouse from moving or hiding money and property. They keep things stable while the case runs.

## AFTER THE DECREE

# Changing or enforcing a Clark County order.

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

**POST-DECREE MOTION****\$250**

To modify or enforce an order after the decree

**ANSWER OR COUNTERCLAIM****\$150**

The other spouse's response or own claim

**REGISTER A FOREIGN DECREE****\$250**

To bring in an order from another state

**Modifying and enforcing**

To change custody or support, or to enforce an order, you file a post-decree motion in your original case. The deposit is \$250. Support changes can also start through the child support agency at (937) 327-1700.

**MOVING WITH THE CHILDREN**

A parent who plans to move should follow Ohio's relocation notice rules before moving. Ask the Clerk's Domestic Relations Department at (937) 521-1680 which form you need and how far ahead to file it.

## HELP ALONG THE WAY

# Mediation, GALs, and parent education.

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

## Mediation

On the juvenile side, the court can send a parenting dispute to mediation. It costs \$100 per parent, paid at the session. Mediation is never used to decide a protection order.

## Guardians ad litem

The court can appoint a guardian ad litem to look into the children's needs and speak to their best interests in a contested case.

## Parent education

In a contested custody case, the court can order both parents to take a parent-education class to limit the impact of the dispute on the children.

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 Clark County.

Find My Service · [gavvl.com/find-my-service](https://gavvl.com/find-my-service)

Get started · [gavvl.com/start](https://gavvl.com/start)

Call · (844) 694-2885

Email · [support@gavvl.com](mailto: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.

<b>FILING FEE</b>	<b>FILING CUTOFF</b>	<b>EX PARTE ORDER</b>	<b>HEARD BY</b>
\$0 to petitioner	3:00 p.m.	Same day	A Magistrate

**How it works here**  
 An adult protection order is filed through the Clerk's Domestic Relations Department under R.C. 3113.31. There is no fee. Filings are taken until 3 p.m. each day. If you ask for custody in the order, file a child-custody affidavit too.

**Ex parte, then a full hearing**  
 The court reviews the petition at an ex parte hearing and can grant a same-day order, delivered to the other person that day. A full hearing follows. A final order can last up to five years.

**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

# The Juvenile Section is for parents who were never married.

Were the parents never married? Then custody, parenting time, and child support are decided in the Juvenile Section, before Judge Lancaster.

## Parentage comes first

In Ohio, the mother of a child born outside marriage is the only legal custodian until a court says otherwise. So a father usually has to prove he is the father first. You can do that by a signed form, through the child support agency, or by a court case.

## Filing for custody as an unmarried parent

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1">Complaint for Parentage and Custody</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1</a>	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Sets parentage, custody, parenting time
<a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1">Parenting Proceeding Affidavit</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1</a>	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Required with a custody filing
<a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1">Child support worksheet</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1</a>	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Required when support is at issue
<a href="https://www.clarkohiojuvcourt.us/forms/">Title IV-D application</a> <a href="https://www.clarkohiojuvcourt.us/forms/">https://www.clarkohiojuvcourt.us/forms/</a>	Juvenile Section	Sets up the support case with the agency

## COSTS AND DNA TESTING

The Juvenile Section is at 101 East Columbia Street, (937) 521-1600. A new custody, parentage, or support case costs \$250. If a parent denies being the father, the court sets a DNA test within about 21 days.

## AFTER A JUVENILE ORDER

# Changing orders and CPS cases.

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

## Modifying a juvenile order

To change custody, parenting time, or support, you file a motion. A motion on a case that is not active costs \$150. Support changes can also start through the agency at (937) 327-1700.

## Abuse, neglect, and dependency

These CPS cases are heard in the Juvenile Section. The court can appoint a guardian ad litem for the children. To report concerns after hours, call (937) 328-2560. For immediate danger, call 911.

## A NOTE ON MEDIATION

The Juvenile Section can send a custody or parenting-time dispute to mediation. It costs \$100 per parent, paid at the session. It is a chance to settle the parenting issues without a contested hearing.

## PART THREE

# Adoption is handled by the Probate Court.

Stepparent and kinship adoptions go to the separate Probate Court, before Judge Carey. Here is the basic shape and cost.

**MINOR ADOPTION****\$154**

For one child; a second child of the same family is \$94

**ADULT OR FOREIGN****\$94**

For an adult adoption or a foreign one

**NAME CHANGE****\$89**

Often done alongside an adoption

**1****File the petition in Probate**

File the Petition for Adoption of a Minor with the child's birth certificate, a background check, and the cost deposit. Probate is at 50 East Columbia Street, 5th floor, (937) 521-1845.

**2****Address consent**

The other parent's consent is usually needed. The court can find consent is not required if a parent had no contact, or gave no support, for the year before filing.

**3****Complete the requirements**

A stepparent case skips the pre-finalization assessment that agency and private adoptions need. You still file a petitioner's account of the costs.

**4****Attend the hearing**

If the court says yes, Judge Carey signs a final decree of adoption. A new birth record can follow.

## PART FOUR

# How Gavvl Law can help in Clark 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](https://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 Clark 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 12, 2026 from official court sources. Court fees, forms, and procedures change. Always confirm current fees and requirements with the Clark 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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