

## PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

# Family Law in Clinton County

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

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- 01** See which court hears your case, all in one building in Wilmington.

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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 Clinton County.

01

## Which court handles this?

The General Division hears divorce and dissolution. The combined Juvenile and Probate Court handles custody for unmarried parents and adoption. All sit in one building on South Street.

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 Clinton 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 REQUIRED

Clinton County has required e-filing for Common Pleas cases since 2024. People who cannot pay the fee can ask the court to waive it. Check the deposit and forms before you file.

### WHAT'S INSIDE

Four parts: Domestic Relations (divorce and dissolution), Juvenile (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. In Clinton County they share one building on South Street in Wilmington. Start with the relationship, and with what you need a judge to decide.

**MARRIED OR FORMERLY MARRIED**

## General Division

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

**WHO HEARS IT**

Judge Andrew T. McCoy.

**PARENTS NEVER MARRIED**

## Juvenile Court

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

**WHO HEARS IT**

Judge Chad L. Carey.

**ADOPTION**

## Probate Court

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

**WHO HEARS IT**

Judge Carey, same as Juvenile.

### One building, one judge for two courts

The General Division, Juvenile Court, and Probate Court all sit at 46 South South Street in Wilmington. Judge Carey hears both Juvenile and Probate. Each court keeps its own forms and fees, so file with the right one for your case.

## PART ONE

# The General Division ends marriages.

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

WHERE YOU FILE	WITHOUT CHILDREN	WITH CHILDREN	RESIDENCY
Clerk, Suite 333	\$300	\$400	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 DEPOSITS

A divorce or dissolution costs \$300 without children and \$400 with children. The deposit goes toward your real costs, and the balance is billed or refunded at the end. One spouse must have lived in Ohio six months before filing.

## DISSOLUTION

# The dissolution packet, step by step.

Dissolution uses the Ohio Supreme Court 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 affirm the agreement. If you do not agree on everything, you need a divorce instead.

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 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	Income and property details
<a href="#">Parenting plan</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; sole or shared parenting
<a href="#">Child support worksheet + IV-D</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; support math and setup
<a href="#">Decree 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 judgment the court signs

**WITH A CHILD UNDER 16****The seminar applies**

If you have a child under 16, both spouses take the Seminar for Separating Parents before the final hearing. Each parent registers and pays the fee. Register within 30 days of filing.

**CONFIRM THE SEMINAR DETAILS**

Clinton County requires the seminar but does not publish the provider, fee, or whether it is online. Call the Common Pleas court at (937) 382-3640 to confirm the accepted seminar before you enroll.

## DIVORCE

# Filing a divorce when you do not agree.

Divorce is e-filed with the Clerk of Courts. Clinton 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
<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="#">Affidavit of Income and Expenses</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	Notarized; filed with the Complaint
<a href="#">Affidavit of Property</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	Lists what you own and owe
<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="#">Rule 75(N) Motion and Affidavit</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 Rule 75(N) Motion and Affidavit with your complaint. It can set temporary custody, child support, and a parenting schedule while the divorce is pending. See the next page for how Clinton handles these.

## IF YOU CANNOT FIND YOUR SPOUSE

Service can be by publication if you cannot find the other spouse. You file a service request, and the court arranges the notice. Ask the Clerk at (937) 382-2316 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.

## How Clinton handles them

You file a Rule 75(N) motion. If the spouses still share a home, the order keeps the current routine and names each parent residential for now. If they live apart, temporary custody usually goes to the parent who had the children for the 10 days before filing.

## Fixing a wrong order

If you think an ex parte temporary order is wrong, you can file a motion for relief. The court gives these priority on its docket, and any change can be made to count back to the order's start date.

## CONFIRM THE RESPONSE TIMING, AND ON EMERGENCIES

Clinton County does not publish a fixed deadline for the other party to respond to a temporary-orders motion. Confirm the current timing with the Clerk at (937) 382-2316. A temporary order cannot change an existing custody order — a true abuse or neglect emergency goes to Juvenile Court. If anyone is in danger right now, call 911.

## CHILDREN

# Custody, parenting time, and the parenting seminar.

Ohio uses specific words for custody. Clinton County also asks parents of younger children to take a short seminar.

**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 seminar, and who needs it

If your case involves a child under 16, both parents take the Seminar for Separating Parents. In a divorce, the residential parent must finish it before the final hearing, and the other parent's time can be paused until they finish.

**CHILD SUPPORT RUNS THROUGH THE CSEA**

The Clinton County child support agency handles support. Reach it at (937) 382-5726. 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. In Clinton County, temporary spousal support takes a motion and a hearing, and can be put on a faster schedule.

## 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 General Division. Legal separation divides property and sets support without ending the marriage. Annulment is rare and has narrow grounds.

## A note on asking a spouse to leave

The court usually will not order a spouse out of the home without notice and a hearing. It can do so on an emergency basis only when you show an urgent need to protect someone's safety, and only on your own sworn testimony. For protection from violence, a protection order may be the better tool.

## AFTER THE DECREE

# Changing or enforcing a Clinton County order.

Life changes after a case ends. To bring a new issue back, you reopen the case that issued your decree.

**REOPEN THE CASE****\$100**

To raise a new issue after the decree

**REOPEN WITH CHILDREN****\$175**

When the issue involves the children

**HOME INVESTIGATION****\$150**

When the court studies a home in a custody case

**Modifying and enforcing**

To change custody or support, or to enforce an order, you reopen your original case. The deposit is \$100, or \$175 if children are involved.

Support changes can also start through the child support agency.

**MOVING WITH THE CHILDREN**

A parent who plans to move should follow Ohio's relocation notice rules before moving. Ask the General Division at (937) 382-3640 which form your decree needs and how far ahead to file it.

## HELP ALONG THE WAY

# Mediation, GALs, and the parenting seminar.

Clinton 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 parenting dispute to mediation to help parents reach an agreement. On the juvenile side, mediation costs \$40. It 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. On the juvenile side, the GAL fee is \$700.

## The seminar

The Seminar for Separating Parents is its own kind of help. It teaches parents how separation affects children and how to lower the stress on them.

## 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 Clinton 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.

FILING FEE	EX PARTE ORDER	FULL HEARING	FINAL ORDER
\$0 to petitioner	Same day	7–10 days	Up to 5 years

**How it works here**  
 An adult protection order is filed with the Clerk on the General Division side, under R.C. 3113.31, using the Ohio standard forms. There is no fee. You can ask for a same-day ex parte order, so be available the day you file.

**The full hearing**  
 A full hearing is set, usually within 7 to 10 days of the ex parte order, where both sides present evidence. A final order can last up to five years and can include no contact and temporary parenting terms.

**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 Court, before Judge Carey.

## 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 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 custody and parenting time
<a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1">Complaint to Establish Parentage</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	When fatherhood is not yet established
<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

### COSTS AND FILING

The Juvenile Court is at 46 South South Street, (937) 382-2391. A complaint for custody, visitation, support, or shared parenting costs \$115 to file. A contempt motion to enforce an order is also \$115. The court can order a DNA test if fatherhood is in question.

## 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 in the existing case. A motion to enforce an order, by contempt, is \$115. Support changes can also start through the agency at (937) 382-5726.

## Abuse, neglect, and dependency

These CPS cases are heard in the Juvenile Court. To report concerns about a child's safety, call (937) 382-5935, or the 24-hour line at (937) 382-2449. For immediate danger, call 911.

## A NOTE ON MEDIATION

The Juvenile Court can send a custody or parenting-time dispute to mediation. It costs \$40 and is a chance to settle the parenting issues without a contested hearing. Ask the court if it fits your case.

## PART THREE

# Adoption is handled by the Probate Court.

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

## ADOPTION

**\$91**

The base deposit for a stepparent or kinship adoption

## PLACEMENT ONLY

**\$45**

When the case is just the placement step

## NAME CHANGE

**\$86**

Often done alongside an adoption

1

**File the petition in Probate**

File the Petition for Adoption with the child's birth certificate and, for a stepparent, the marriage certificate. Probate is in Suite 224, (937) 382-2280.

2

**Address consent**

The other parent's consent is usually needed, and so is the child's if they are 12 or older. The court can waive a parent's consent for a year of no contact or support.

3

**Complete the home study**

A home study or assessment is usually required, and it is often smaller for a stepparent case than for others.

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 Clinton 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 Clinton 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 15, 2026 from official court sources. Court fees, forms, and procedures change. Always confirm current fees and requirements with the Clinton 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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