

## PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

# Family Law in Defiance County

A plain-English map for divorce, dissolution, custody, support, and adoption in Defiance County: which court to use, what to gather, what it costs, and when to ask for help.

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- 01** Find the right court before you start filling out forms.

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

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  - 03** See the filings, fees, deadlines, and local steps that most often slow people down in Defiance County.

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  - 04** Pick a next step that fits your risk, budget, and timeline.

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## START HERE

# Use this guide like a map, not a textbook.

Family-law problems get easier once you can name four things. They are the court, the path, the paperwork, and the next step. This guide is built around those four questions, for Defiance County.

01

## What court handles this?

Domestic Relations handles divorce and dissolution. Juvenile handles custody or support when the parents were never married. Probate handles adoption.

02

## Do you agree, or is there a dispute?

Agreement changes the path. Dissolution and uncontested filings run on signed paperwork. If someone disagrees or misses a deadline, plan for a more protective process. Do the same if safety is a concern.

03

## What should you gather first?

Start with court orders, filings, and income records. Add insurance details, school schedules, and messages about parenting time. Keep a short list of what you need the court to decide.

**IF YOU WERE SERVED PAPERS**

Do not wait for the hearing date to act.  
 Read the first page for a response deadline.  
 Save every document. Write a short timeline of  
 what happened. If a temporary order or  
 emergency motion is attached, get advice  
 quickly.

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**IMPORTANT**

This guide is information, not legal advice.

It explains how things generally work in Defiance County. It cannot account for the facts of your situation. Reading 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.

## QUESTION ONE

# Which court is handling your family-law issue?

Defiance County splits family law across two judges. Divorce, dissolution, legal separation, and annulment are heard in the Domestic Relations Division of Common Pleas. Protection orders are filed there too. Paternity, unmarried-parent custody, and adoption go to the combined Probate and Juvenile Court.

**MARRIED OR FORMERLY MARRIED**

## Domestic Relations

Divorce and dissolution. Legal separation and spousal support. Dividing property and debt. Parenting issues inside a divorce.

**IN THIS COUNTY**

Common Pleas Court,  
Domestic Relations Division  
(Judge Joseph N. Schmenk)  
221 Clinton St., 3rd Floor,  
Defiance, OH 43512  
(419) 782-1936

**PARENTS NEVER MARRIED**

## Juvenile Court

Custody, parenting time, parentage, child support, and changes to existing juvenile orders.

**IN THIS COUNTY**

Defiance County Probate &  
Juvenile Court (Judge Jeffrey  
A. Strausbaugh)  
221 Clinton St., 2nd Floor,  
Defiance, OH 43512  
(419) 782-4181

**ADOPTION**

## Probate Court

Stepparent adoption, kinship adoption, and name changes tied to an adoption.

**IN THIS COUNTY**

Defiance County Probate  
Court  
221 Clinton St., 2nd Floor,  
Defiance, OH 43512  
(419) 782-4181

### Why this matters

Filing in the wrong court costs time and money. It also creates confusion about deadlines, service, and temporary orders. If your facts touch more than one court, sort that out first.

## PART ONE

# Domestic Relations is the divorce and dissolution court.

If you are married, ending the marriage usually runs through Domestic Relations. The first question is whether both spouses can sign one complete agreement.

## QUICK PATHFINDER

## Do you both agree on everything?

If yes, a dissolution may be possible. If no, a divorce may be the safer or required path. Agreement means more than wanting the case over. It means signed terms on property, debt, support, parenting, and child support when there are children.

### Dissolution is built on agreement.

Both spouses file together and ask the court to approve their signed separation agreement. The court still reviews the paperwork and usually holds a short final hearing.

### Divorce is built for disagreement or the unknown.

One spouse files against the other. A divorce can still settle, but it gives the court a process for service, deadlines, temporary orders, and trial if needed.

#### BEFORE YOU FILE

- Confirm you meet Ohio residency and county venue.
- List all property, debt, vehicles, retirement, and real estate.
- Gather income, tax, health-insurance, and child-care records.
- Write down what you need the first court order to address.

#### WHEN TO SLOW DOWN

Do not rush a form packet if there are safety concerns, hidden money, a spouse who will not share information, pressure to sign, immigration concerns, or a child emergency. Those facts can change both your strategy and your timing.

PATH A

# Dissolution can be calmer — when the agreement is real.

Dissolution is often the right path when both spouses are ready to sign the same documents, and neither one needs the court to force information, service, or a temporary order.

COURT	TYPICAL PACE	SERVICE	BEST FIT
Domestic Relations	About 30 to 90 days	Waived (joint filing)	A signed deal

**This path may fit if...**

- Both spouses agree the marriage should end.
- Property, debt, support, and parenting terms are already settled.
- Both people can sign and attend the final hearing.

**It is not for you if...**

You disagree on money or parenting, you cannot locate your spouse, or you need a temporary order now. In those cases a divorce is the right filing.

Core filing	A joint petition for dissolution
Agreement	A separation agreement both spouses sign
If there are minor children	A parenting plan, a child-support worksheet, and health-insurance details
Final step	A short hearing where both spouses confirm the agreement

**The common mistake**

People treat dissolution as an easy divorce and skip the hard part: checking whether the agreement covers the future. A court can approve terms that are clear enough to enforce even when they are not good terms for you.

**HEADS UP IN DEFIANCE COUNTY**

A dissolution is filed jointly with a signed separation agreement and a waiver of service — there is no service of summons. By statute the final hearing is held 30 to 90 days after filing, and both spouses must appear. If there are children, both parents must finish the A-OK parenting class within 75 days.

## DISSOLUTION · THE PAPERWORK, WITH LINKS

# Every form you need, linked to the source.

These are the dissolution filings used in Defiance County. Tap a form name to open the official PDF. Confirm current versions with the court before you file.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="#">Petition for Dissolution (SF 17)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form17.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form17.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Starts a joint dissolution; both spouses sign and waive service.
<a href="#">Separation Agreement (SF 19)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form19.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form19.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Your signed agreement on property, debt, and support.
<a href="#">Defiance DR-1 (Income &amp; Expenses) &amp; DR-2 (Property)</a> <a href="https://www.defiance-county.com/common-pleas-court/Local_Rules_-_1-31-23.pdf">https://www.defiance-county.com/common-pleas-court/Local_Rules_-_1-31-23.pdf</a>	defiance-county.com	Required financial affidavits filed by both spouses.
<p>△ Heads up: Defiance uses local affidavit forms DR-1 and DR-2 (inside the DR local-rules PDF, Appendix G) in place of the statewide affidavit numbering — both spouses file them.</p>		
<a href="#">Parenting Proceeding Affidavit (DR-3 / Affidavit 3)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Affidavit3.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Affidavit3.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Required when there are minor children.
<a href="#">Health Insurance Affidavit (DR-4 / Affidavit 4)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Affidavit4.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Affidavit4.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Shows health coverage for the children.
<a href="#">Shared Parenting Plan (SF 20) or Parenting Plan (SF 21)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form20.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form20.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Sets parenting time and decision-making when there are children.
<a href="#">Decree of Dissolution (SF 18)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form18.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form18.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	The final order the court signs to end the marriage.

**READING ON PAPER?**

Form links open the official court or Supreme Court of Ohio PDFs. Court versions change — confirm you have the current form before you file.

## PATH B

# Divorce gives the court a process when agreement is missing.

A divorce does not always mean a trial. It means the case starts with one spouse filing, the other being served, and the court setting a structure for deadlines and decisions.

1

**Complaint filed**

One spouse files the divorce complaint and asks the clerk to issue service.

2

**Service and answer**

The other spouse is formally served and has a deadline to respond.

3

**Temporary decisions**

The court can address parenting, support, bills, housing, or conduct while the case is pending.

4

**Settlement or hearing**

Many cases settle after documents are exchanged. If not, the court decides the disputed issues.

**USE DIVORCE WHEN**

You need a deadline, a temporary order, information, or a judge's decision.

Divorce is often the necessary path when a spouse will not sign. It also fits when money is unclear, parenting time is disputed, or someone needs the court to act before a settlement.

**IF YOU WERE SERVED**

1. Find the answer deadline on the papers — about 28 days after you are served (Ohio Civ.R. 12(A)).
2. Do not rely on a promise that the case is on hold.
3. Save the summons, complaint, and any temporary-order papers.
4. List the urgent issues: housing, money, children, safety, vehicles, insurance.

Good divorce strategy is organized, not loud.

The strongest early move is usually a clean timeline and complete financial documents. Add a clear list of what must be decided now and what can wait for the final settlement.

**HEADS UP IN DEFIANCE COUNTY**

Divorce is filed in the Domestic Relations Division of Common Pleas (Judge Joseph N. Schmenk; Magistrate Carson L. Slade), through the Clerk of Courts. If there are minor children, both parents must complete the Assisting Our Kids (A-OK) class online within 75 days of filing — missing it can make a parent ineligible for an allocation of parental rights. Self-represented pleadings are reviewed by the court before they are time-stamped.

## ANSWERING A DIVORCE · AND THE DIVORCE PAPERWORK

# Responding protects your side of the case.

If your spouse filed, you can file an answer, and you can file a counterclaim to ask for your own relief. Missing the answer deadline can let the case move ahead without you.

**ANSWER**

Respond to what was filed

An answer tells the court which parts of the complaint you agree with and which you dispute.

**COUNTERCLAIM**

Ask for your own relief

A counterclaim lets you request your own orders on property, support, and parenting, in the same case.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="#">Complaint for Divorce — with children (SF 7)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form7.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form7.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Starts a divorce when there are minor children.
<a href="#">Complaint for Divorce — no children (SF 6)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form6.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form6.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Starts a divorce when there are no minor children.
<a href="#">Answer — with children (SF 11) / no children (SF 10)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form11.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form11.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	The responding spouse's reply; generally due 28 days after service.
<a href="#">Counterclaim — with children (SF 9) / no children (SF 8)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form9.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form9.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Lets the responding spouse ask for their own relief.
<a href="#">Defiance DR-1, DR-2, DR-3, DR-4 + Child Support Worksheet</a> <a href="https://www.defiance-county.com/common-pleas-court/Local_Rules_-_1-31-23.pdf">https://www.defiance-county.com/common-pleas-court/Local_Rules_-_1-31-23.pdf</a>	defiance-county.com	Financial, property, parenting, and health-insurance affidavits.

△ Heads up: These local DR affidavit forms live in the DR local-rules PDF (Appendix G). File DR-1 and DR-2 with the complaint; add DR-3, DR-4, and a child-support worksheet when there are children.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="#">Decree of Divorce — with children (SF 15) / no children (SF 14)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form15.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form15.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	The final order ending the marriage.

**READING ON PAPER?**

Form links open the official court or Supreme Court of Ohio PDFs. Court versions change — confirm you have the current form before you file.

## WHILE THE CASE IS PENDING

# Temporary orders keep life running until the final decree.

A divorce can take months. Temporary orders set the rules in the meantime: who lives where, who pays which bills, and the parenting schedule while the case is open.

HOW TO ASK	RESPONSE WINDOW	RULE	COVERS
A motion plus an affidavit	Ex parte hearing within 10 days if requested	Defiance DR Loc.R. 10.04	Support, bills, parenting

## How temporary orders work

Many courts decide the request on the written affidavits, without live testimony. That makes your affidavit and attached proof the heart of the request.

## Answer on time

If you were served with a motion for temporary orders, the response window is short. Missing it can let the court rule on the other side's affidavit alone.

## HEADS UP IN DEFIANCE COUNTY

On the filing of a divorce, the court issues a Preliminary Injunction restraining both spouses from hiding or disposing of assets. For an emergency ex parte order you must show exigent circumstances by sworn affidavit; if the other party requests a hearing the court holds one within 10 days (within 3 weeks if no hearing is requested) (DR Loc.R. 10.04). Your DR-1 affidavit must be on file to ask for temporary support or custody.

## CUSTODY AND PARENTING TIME

# Parenting terms have to work on a regular Tuesday.

Ohio does not use the phrase "joint custody." The court either names one parent the sole legal custodian, or orders shared parenting, where both parents keep legal decision-making. Day-to-day time is called parenting time.

**SOLE CUSTODY**

One legal decision-maker  
One parent is the residential parent and legal custodian. The other parent usually still has parenting time on a set schedule.

**SHARED PARENTING**

Both keep a legal say  
Both parents share legal decision-making under a written plan. Shared parenting is about decisions, not an automatic 50/50 split of time.

**PARENTING TIME**

The actual schedule  
This is the calendar: school weeks, weekends, holidays, breaks, and exchanges. The court's schedule a/b parenting-time guidelines is the starting point unless you agree on your own.

**ASKING FOR SHARED PARENTING**

The parent who wants it must file a written plan.

If you want shared parenting, you have to submit a proposed shared parenting plan. The court will not build one for you.

**A CLEARER WAY TO ASK**

Instead of "I want full custody," write the real outcome you need: safer exchanges, a predictable school-night schedule, medical decision-making, or make-up time. Courts decide on the child's best interests.

**PARENTING SEMINAR**

In a case with children, Defiance County requires the Assisting Our Kids (A-OK) class, online at [assistingourkids.com](http://assistingourkids.com). Finish it within 75 days of filing. Cost: paid from your court-cost deposit. It can usually be taken online.

**HEADS UP IN DEFIANCE COUNTY**

The parenting-class requirement is Domestic Relations only — married parents must take A-OK, but the Defiance County Juvenile Court does not require a parenting class. The court's Schedule A/B guidelines set the default parenting time (with separate under- and over-150-mile schedules) when parents don't agree.

## CHILD SUPPORT

# Support is a calculation, not a guess.

Ohio uses a statewide formula. It runs on both parents' incomes, the parenting schedule, health-insurance costs, child-care costs, and other children either parent supports.

**WHAT DRIVES THE NUMBER****Income and proof**

Gather pay stubs, W-2s, and recent tax returns for both parents, plus the cost of the child's health insurance and any work-related child care.

**WHEN IT CAN CHANGE****Deviations**

A court can adjust the guideline amount when the facts justify it — for example, a parenting schedule far from standard, or special needs.

**WHO RUNS IT****The CSEA**

The county Child Support Enforcement Agency usually collects, records, and enforces support, often through automatic income withholding.

**Changing an existing order**

Either parent can ask for a review when incomes or costs change a lot. You keep paying the current order until the court changes it — stopping on your own creates arrears.

**Use the official calculator**

Ohio publishes the child-support worksheet and calculator. Running real numbers before a hearing tells you what to expect.

**HEADS UP IN DEFIANCE COUNTY**

Child support runs through the Defiance County CSEA. A child-support modification is effective back to the date the motion was filed, so don't stop paying the current order on your own. Support can continue past 18 while a child finishes high school full-time, but not past 19.

## PROPERTY, DEBT, AND SPOUSAL SUPPORT

# Divide what you built, and decide whether support is owed.

Ohio splits marital property and debt fairly — which usually means equally, but not always. Separate property you brought in or inherited can stay yours if you can prove it.

**MARITAL VS. SEPARATE****What gets divided**

Most things gained during the marriage are marital, no matter whose name is on them. Gifts to one spouse and inheritances are often separate if kept separate.

**RETIREMENT ACCOUNTS****QDRO and DOPO**

Splitting a 401(k), pension, or public pension usually needs a separate court order — a QDRO, or a DOPO for Ohio public pensions — to avoid taxes and penalties.

**SPOUSAL SUPPORT****Whether and how much**

There is no fixed formula. The court weighs incomes, the length of the marriage, earning ability, and more, and can order support for a set time.

**Get the financial picture complete first**

Vague terms on real estate, debt, taxes, or retirement cause the biggest long-term problems. A full, documented financial picture protects you years from now.

## AFTER THE ORDER

# Modifications, contempt, objections, and out-of-state orders.

A final order is not always the end. Life changes, people ignore orders, and sometimes an out-of-state order needs to be enforced here. Each of these has its own path.

**MODIFICATION****Change an existing order**

To change custody, parenting time, or support you file a motion and usually show a real change in circumstances since the last order.

**CONTEMPT****Enforce an order**

If the other person ignores a court order, you can file for contempt. Bring proof of what was ordered and what was not done.

**OBJECTIONS****Disagree with a magistrate**

When a magistrate decides your case, you usually have about 14 days (Ohio Civ.R. 53(D)) to file written objections with the judge.

**OUT-OF-STATE ORDERS****Register it here**

An order from another state can be registered in Ohio so a local court can enforce or change it under the interstate custody and support rules.

**HEADS UP IN DEFIANCE COUNTY**

Post-decree motions go back to the same Domestic Relations case that issued your decree (continuing jurisdiction), filed with the Clerk of Courts — a Motion/Post-Decree deposit is \$280 (\$50 with a consent judgment). You then have 14 days to object to a magistrate's decision.

## SAFETY

# A protection order is a separate, faster case.

If you are in danger from a family or household member, you can ask for a domestic violence civil protection order. It is its own case and is built to move quickly.

**STEP ONE****File the petition**

You file at the Common Pleas Court (Domestic Relations/General Division), through the Clerk of Courts. There is no filing fee for the person asking for protection.

**STEP TWO****The ex parte order**

A judge can grant a temporary order the same day, based on your sworn petition, before the other person is heard.

**STEP THREE****The full hearing**

Within days the court holds a full hearing where both sides can testify. A full order can last up to five years.

**HEADS UP IN DEFIANCE COUNTY**

A protection-order petition can be filed the same day with no official daily cutoff, but whether the magistrate signs an ex parte order that day depends on the schedule. There is no filing fee (R.C. 3113.31). Mediation is prohibited in protection-order matters. Sarah's House offers local victim support.

**If you are in immediate danger, call 911.**

A protection order is a legal tool, not an emergency response. Use it alongside a safety plan, not instead of one.

## PART ONE · FORMS CHEAT-SHEET

# The Domestic Relations forms, in one place.

Here are the Defiance County Domestic Relations forms people reach for most.

Tap any name to open the official PDF.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="#">Complaint for Divorce — with children (SF 7)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form7.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form7.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Start a divorce with minor children.
<a href="#">Complaint for Divorce — no children (SF 6)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form6.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form6.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Start a divorce with no minor children.
<a href="#">Petition for Dissolution (SF 17)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form17.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form17.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Start a joint, fully agreed dissolution.
<a href="#">Separation Agreement (SF 19)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form19.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form19.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Set out the agreed terms in a dissolution.
<a href="#">Defiance DR-1 &amp; DR-2 affidavits</a> <a href="https://www.defiance-county.com/common-pleas-court/Local_Rules_-_1-31-23.pdf">https://www.defiance-county.com/common-pleas-court/Local_Rules_-_1-31-23.pdf</a>	defiance-county.com	Required income/expense and property affidavits.
<a href="#">Motion for Contempt (SF 24 / JF 3)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form24.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form24.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Enforce an order the other side ignored.
<a href="#">Motion for Change of Custody (SF 27 / JF 6)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form27.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form27.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Ask to change an existing custody order.
<a href="#">Decree of Divorce — with children (SF 15)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form15.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form15.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	The final order in a divorce with children.

**READING ON PAPER?**

Form links open the official court or Supreme Court of Ohio PDFs. Court versions change — confirm you have the current form before you file.

**NEXT STEP**

Not sure which path fits your situation?

The 2-minute [Find My Service quiz](#) gives you a personalized recommendation and your payment options. You can also call (844) 694-2885 or start at [gavvl.com/start](https://gavvl.com/start).

## PART TWO

# Juvenile Court handles custody when parents were never married.

When parents were not married, custody, parenting time, and support usually run through Juvenile Court. The first question is whether there is already a court order.

**FIRST ORDER****Establishing custody or parenting time**

The court may need parentage, a parenting schedule, support information, and service on the other parent. If everyone agrees, the case is narrower. If not, expect hearings and evidence.

**EXISTING ORDER****Changing custody or parenting time**

To modify an order, you usually show why it should change. You also show why the new arrangement fits the child's best interests.

**If there is no order yet**

Informal arrangements are fragile. A written court order gives everyone clear rules to follow. That includes both parents and the child's school and doctors.

**GOOD TO KNOW**

Juvenile cases are document-heavy even when the issue sounds simple. Bring every prior order, agency letter, and school or medical record to the first conversation.

## PARENTAGE AND EMERGENCIES

# Parentage comes first; emergencies move fast.

For unmarried parents, parentage usually has to be legally established first. Only then can a court order custody or support. And when a child is in danger, there is a faster track.

**ESTABLISHING PARENTAGE****Why it has to happen first**

Parentage decides who can be ordered to pay support and who has standing on custody. It can be set by a signed acknowledgment. The child-support agency or a court with genetic testing can also set it.

**EMERGENCY CUSTODY****When a child is at risk**

If a child faces immediate harm, a parent can ask for an emergency custody order. Courts set a high bar, so come ready with specific, recent facts and any proof.

**Support can run on its own track**

Child support may be handled with the custody case or through the county child-support agency. Ask which track your matter is on so nothing falls through a gap.

## JUVENILE COURT · THE PAPERWORK, WITH LINKS

# The juvenile filings, linked to the source.

These are common Defiance County Juvenile Court forms for parentage, custody, and support. Tap a name to open the official PDF.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="#">Complaint for Parentage / Allocation of Parental Rights (SF 23 / JF 2)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form23.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form23.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Establishes paternity and asks the court to set custody and parenting time.
<a href="#">Parenting Judgment Entry (SF 22 / JF 1)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form22.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form22.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	The order that finalizes custody and parenting time.
<a href="#">Motion for Change of Custody (SF 27 / JF 6)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form27.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form27.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Asks to change who is the residential parent and legal custodian.
<a href="#">Motion for Change of Parenting Time (SF 26 / JF 5)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form26.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form26.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Asks to change companionship and visitation.
<a href="#">Motion for Change of Child Support (SF 28 / JF 7)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form28.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form28.pdf</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Asks to change support, medical support, or the tax exemption.
<a href="#">Determination of Paternity (Defiance local form)</a> <a href="https://www.defiance-county.com/probate-and-juvenile-court/forms/juvenile-forms/paternity-custody-visitation/Determination%20of%20Paternity.pdf">https://www.defiance-county.com/probate-and-juvenile-court/forms/juvenile-forms/paternity-custody-visitation/Determination%20of%20Paternity.pdf</a>	defiance-county.com	Local parentage form used in Juvenile filings.
<a href="#">More Defiance juvenile forms (Schedules A/B, Seek Work, indigency)</a> <a href="https://www.defiance-county.com/probate-and-juvenile-court/juvenile-court-forms.php">https://www.defiance-county.com/probate-and-juvenile-court/juvenile-court-forms.php</a>	defiance-county.com	County fillable juvenile forms.

⚠ Heads up: New Juvenile cases must be filed as originals, in person or by mail. The fillable PDFs can be typed into and printed but not saved.

**READING ON PAPER?**

Form links open the official court or Supreme Court of Ohio PDFs. Court versions change — confirm you have the current form before you file.

PART THREE

# Adoption is joyful — and the paperwork is exacting.

Adoption cases run through Probate Court. They turn on consent, notice, and background checks. They also turn on a home study and whether the relationship is ready to be made final.

STEP PARENT ADOPTION

## The consent question comes first.

If the other legal parent consents, the path is usually more direct. If consent is missing or contested, the case is more complex and needs careful review before filing.

Common filings	Petition, consents, a proposed decree, and a birth-certificate update
Common checks	Background checks, a home study, and notice to required people
Home study	Almost always required — a caseworker reviews your home and history
Final step	A probate hearing and an updated birth certificate

**STEP ONE**

**Confirm eligibility**

Relationship, residence, marriage timing, the child's age, and the consent facts all matter.

**STEP TWO**

**Build the packet**

Use the Supreme Court adoption forms and keep your supporting documents organized by requirement.

**STEP THREE**

**Prepare for the hearing**

Know who must attend, what the judge may ask, and what happens after the court approves.

**HEADS UP IN DEFIANCE COUNTY**

Defiance includes the court assessor's home-study fee inside the adoption deposit — no separate charge. For a child born on or after January 1, 1997, the petitioner's attorney must request a Putative Father Registry search and file the result. In a stepparent adoption, notify any court or CSEA with a pending support case so that order can be ended or reduced.

## ADOPTION · FORMS AND COST

# The adoption filings, linked.

These are the standard adoption forms. Tap a name to open the official PDF, and confirm current fees with the Probate Court.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="#">Petition for Adoption (OSC Probate adoption series)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/probate/5">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/probate/5</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Starts a stepparent or kinship adoption.
<a href="#">OSC Form 19.4 (child-support component)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/probate/5">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/probate/5</a>	Supreme Court of Ohio	Used for the support-related part of the adoption.
<a href="#">Statement of Adopted Person — DCForm-9A ("SOAP")</a> <a href="https://www.defiance-county.com/probate-and-juvenile-court/forms/probate-forms/adoption/DCForm-9A-Statement%20of%20Adopted%20Person.pdf">https://www.defiance-county.com/probate-and-juvenile-court/forms/probate-forms/adoption/DCForm-9A-Statement%20of%20Adopted%20Person.pdf</a>	defiance-county.com	Defiance's required local adoption form.

⚠ Heads up: Defiance adds one local form to the OSC set — the Statement of Adopted Person (DCForm-9A). Adoption filings may be mailed, received up to the 4:30 PM closing time.

#### READING ON PAPER?

Form links open the official court or Supreme Court of Ohio PDFs. Court versions change — confirm you have the current form before you file.

#### WHAT IT COSTS

Plan on a \$400 Probate deposit for a stepparent or kinship adoption. A private or pre-placement adoption is \$550, and an adult adoption is \$225. In Defiance County that deposit covers the court's home-study fee, with no extra charge. You still pay any publication or mailing costs. Confirm current amounts with the Probate Court.

## NEXT STEP

Not sure which path fits your situation?

The 2-minute [Find My Service quiz](#) gives you a personalized recommendation and your payment options. You can also call (844) 694-2885 or start at [gavvl.com/start](https://gavvl.com/start).

## PART FOUR

# You do not always need the same kind of legal help.

The guide gave you the map. Here is what working with Gavvl looks like if you want company on the road. Some people need full representation. Others need a lawyer for one hard part.

**FULL REPRESENTATION**

An attorney handles the whole case with you.

One attorney manages strategy, every filing, negotiation, and each court appearance from the first meeting through the final orders. Best when a case is contested, high-conflict, or may go to trial. Billed as a retainer plus hourly fees.

**LIMITED-SCOPE (FLAT FEE)**

Hire a lawyer for the part you actually need.

Pay a flat fee for a specific task: drafting and filing, a single hearing, advice, or document review. Best for uncontested matters and tighter budgets. It is not the right fit for complex or high-conflict cases that need ongoing advocacy.

**GOOD TO KNOW**

A matter that starts limited-scope can often move to full representation if it becomes contested. You are not locked in.

**Divorce and dissolution**

Strategy, settlement terms, filing packets, temporary orders, negotiation, and final hearings.

**Custody and parenting**

Parenting schedules, shared parenting plans, modifications, and hearing preparation.

**Child support**

Calculations, income documentation, deviations, modifications, and enforcement.

**Adoption**

Stepparent and kinship adoption planning, consent review, and finalization.

## WAYS TO PAY

# Flexible options, and one with no credit check.

Your options depend on the service, because Ohio trust-account rules treat retainers and flat fees differently. Exact amounts are set when you enroll.

**FULL REPRESENTATION****Retainer-based options**

Pay in full by card through Confido Legal. Or use Affirm for monthly payments. Affirm uses a soft credit check that does not affect your score.

**LIMITED-SCOPE (FLAT FEE)****The widest range**

Pay in full by card, or finance through Affirm, Klarna, or PayPal Pay Later, including interest-free options where available.

**GAVVL DIRECT · NO CREDIT CHECK****An in-house payment plan.**

Start now with 60% down and finance the rest. Or finance the full fee and begin once 60% is paid in. Choose 18 weekly, 8 bi-weekly, or 4 monthly payments. The financed amount carries 19% annual interest, compounded monthly.

**SCAN WITH YOUR PHONE**

**FIND MY SERVICE**  
2-minute quiz



**SCHEDULE**  
Book a  
consultation

## GET STARTED

# A short quiz, or a quick call.

You do not have to figure out the right service on your own. The quiz points you to a fit and your payment options. A low-cost consultation gets you specific advice on your situation.

**FASTEST****The Find My Service quiz**

About two minutes. It recommends a service and shows your payment options.

[gavvl.com/find-my-service](https://gavvl.com/find-my-service).

**TALK TO SOMEONE****Call or book a consult**

Call (844) 694-2885, email [support@gavvl.com](mailto:support@gavvl.com), or start at [gavvl.com/start](https://gavvl.com/start). Consultations are low-cost.

**ABOUT GAVVL LAW**

Gavvl Law is a modern Ohio family-law firm serving all 88 counties. It was founded by attorneys who have personally been through divorce and custody. The firm holds a 4.8+ average across 90+ verified Google reviews. It was also named a Best Lawyers "Firm to Watch" for 2026. See the note on the next page about what awards and ratings mean.

**NEXT STEP****Not sure which path fits your situation?**

The 2-minute [Find My Service quiz](#) gives you a personalized recommendation and your payment options. You can also call (844) 694-2885 or start at [gavvl.com/start](https://gavvl.com/start).

## IMPORTANT DISCLOSURES

# The fine print, in plain language.

**NOT LEGAL ADVICE**

This guide is information, not legal advice.

It explains how things generally work in Defiance County, but it cannot account for the facts of your case. Reading it or contacting Gavvl Law does not create an attorney-client relationship. Only a signed engagement agreement does that.

**ACCURACY****Fees and rules change**

Court fees, forms, and procedures change. The information here was verified as of June 16, 2026 from official court sources. Always confirm current fees and requirements with the Defiance County Clerk of Courts before you file.

**AWARDS AND RATINGS****What they mean**

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

**JURISDICTION AND RESPONSIBILITY**

Gavvl Law attorneys are licensed to practice law in Ohio. This guide describes Ohio law and Defiance County procedure only. Attorney responsible for this content: Stephanie Green, Esq., Managing Partner. Gavvl Law LLC, 1677 Old Henderson Road, Columbus, Ohio 43220. Privacy policy: [gavvl.com/privacy-policy](https://gavvl.com/privacy-policy).

NOT SURE WHERE TO START?

# Take the 2-minute quiz or book a consultation.

We will help you name the court, the likely path, and the level of help that fits the moment.

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(844) 694-2885

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[support@gavvl.com](mailto:support@gavvl.com)

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[gavvl.com/find-my-service](https://gavvl.com/find-my-service)

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