

PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

Family Law in Fairfield County

A plain-English map to divorce, dissolution, custody, support, protection orders, and adoption in Fairfield County: which court handles your issue, what to file, what it costs, and when to ask for help.

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- 01** Find the right Fairfield County court before you fill out a single form.

 - 02** Learn the local quirk: unmarried-parent custody is heard in Domestic Relations here, not Juvenile.

 - 03** See the exact forms, fees, deadlines, and filing steps that trip people up at the Hall of Justice in Lancaster.

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

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START HERE

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

Family-law problems get easier the moment you can name the court, the path, the paperwork, and your next decision. Fairfield County is unusual, so step one is knowing which court is yours.

01

Married, or ending a marriage?

Divorce, dissolution, legal separation, and annulment are heard by the Domestic Relations Division. You file with the Clerk of Courts on the 4th floor of the Hall of Justice.

02

Parents who were never married?

In Fairfield County, custody, parenting time, parentage, and support for unmarried parents are heard in Domestic Relations too — not Juvenile. That is the opposite of most Ohio counties.

03

A relative raising a child, or adopting?

Custody going to a non-relative is the one custody type Juvenile Court handles. Adoption is filed in the Probate Division of the combined Juvenile and Probate Court.

READ THIS FIRST

This guide is information, not legal advice.

It explains how things generally work in Fairfield County, but it can't account for the facts of your situation. 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 case, talk with a licensed Ohio attorney.

FAIRFIELD COUNTY COURTS

Where your case lives, and who to call.

All three family-law courts sit in the Hall of Justice at 224 East Main Street, Lancaster, on different floors. The one rule that changes everything here: most parent-custody work is Domestic Relations, not Juvenile.

COURT	WHAT IT HANDLES	WHERE / CONTACT
Domestic Relations Division Common Pleas	Divorce, dissolution, legal separation, annulment, DVCPPO, and — unusually — parentage, custody, parenting time, and support for unmarried parents	Hall of Justice, 224 E. Main St., 4th Floor, Lancaster Judge Laura B. Smith 740-652-7440
Juvenile Division combined with Probate	Only custody transfers to a non-relative, plus abuse / neglect / dependency and delinquency	224 E. Main St., 3rd Floor, Lancaster Judge Terre L. Vandervoort 740-652-7463
Probate Division combined with Juvenile	Stepparent and kinship adoption	224 E. Main St., 3rd Floor, Lancaster 740-652-7485
Clerk of Courts DR Division	Files and docket all Domestic Relations cases; takes your deposit	Hall of Justice, 4th Floor Branden C. Meyer 740-652-7357

THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT LOCAL QUIRK

Unmarried parents file in Domestic Relations here.

In most Ohio counties, custody for parents who were never married goes to Juvenile Court. Fairfield County is the opposite: by a standing agreement between the courts, the Domestic Relations Division hears parentage, custody, parenting time, and support for unmarried parents (these carry a “PA” case number). The Juvenile Court takes a custody case only when custody is going to a non-relative. Confirm the posture before you file.

FAIRFIELD COUNTY COURTS

Child support, child safety, and filing rules.

A few more contacts and habits will save you a trip to Lancaster.

MONEY FOR THE KIDS
Child support — Fairfield County CSEA

The Child Support Enforcement Agency sets up and enforces support, and can review an order administratively.

- 239 West Main Street, Lancaster
- 740-652-7888 or 1-800-409-2732
- Pay to Ohio CSPC, P.O. Box 182372, Columbus, OH 43218

DON'T GET BOUNCED AT THE COUNTER
How Fairfield County wants filings.

The Clerk accepts single-sided paper only — double-sided documents are refused. New cases and any filing that carries a fee must be filed in person or by mail, never by e-mail or fax, and nothing over 20 pages may be e-mailed or faxed.

IF A CHILD MAY BE UNSAFE
Reporting abuse or neglect

Call Fairfield County Protective Services at 740-652-7887 (24/7). After hours, call the Sheriff at 740-652-7900. The statewide hotline is 1-855-642-4453. If a child is in immediate danger, call 911.

File in person or mail	New cases and fee-bearing filings
Pay court costs online	payments.lexisnexis.com (use your case no.)
DR Court hours	Mon–Fri 8–4, closed 12–1 for lunch
Need a payment plan?	Clerk Fiscal Dept., 740-652-7356

PART ONE

Domestic Relations: the court that does the most.

If you are married and ending it — or you are an unmarried parent who needs custody, parenting time, or support — your case almost certainly lives here. This part walks through each path in the order most people meet them.

COURT	WHERE	JUDGE	FILES WITH
Common Pleas (DR)	Hall of Justice, 4th FL.	Laura B. Smith	Clerk of Courts (DR)

WHY THIS PART IS BIGGER THAN USUAL

One court, many doors.

Because Fairfield County routes unmarried-parent custody to Domestic Relations, this single division handles divorce and dissolution, legal separation and annulment, parentage and custody, parenting time, child support, protection orders, and everything after the decree. Find your door below.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

Dissolution: the fully agreed way to end a marriage.

A dissolution is the no-fault path for couples who agree on everything. You both sign a full agreement, file a joint petition, and appear together at a short hearing. No one is served, and there are no fault grounds to prove.

COURT	FILING FEE	HEARING	SERVICE
Common Pleas (DR)	\$300 / \$350 with kids	30–90 days	None — joint filing

This path may fit if...

- You both agree the marriage should end.
- Property, debt, support, and parenting are already settled in writing.
- You will both sign the paperwork and attend the final hearing.

Watch the agreement, not just the forms.
 A clean-looking packet can still cause years of trouble if retirement, taxes, the house, debt, insurance, or parenting terms are vague. The court can approve terms that are clear enough to enforce, even when they are not good terms for you.

Core filing	Joint Petition for Dissolution
Agreement	Separation Agreement, signed by both
If minor children	Parenting plan, child-support worksheet, health-insurance details
Parenting class	Children In Between (online, \$25)
Final step	Short hearing where you both confirm the deal

A REAL FAIRFIELD COUNTY RULE
 The agreement is attached to the decree. Local Rule 22.5 requires the signed Separation Agreement to be attached to every dissolution decree, and the spouses must list different addresses. File complete paperwork before 3:00 p.m. for the best chance the hearing and order finish the same day.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

Divorce: are you starting it, or responding to it?

Divorce does not always mean a trial. It means one spouse files, the other is served, and the court sets a structure. Your very first move depends on which side of that you are on.

A

You are starting the divorce

You file a Complaint for Divorce (with or without children) with the DR Clerk and ask for service on your spouse. The moment you file, the court automatically issues a mutual restraining order (Local Rule 9.3) that keeps things in place while the case runs.

B

You were served with divorce papers

Read the first page for your answer deadline. You have 28 days from service to file an Answer (and a Counterclaim if you want your own requests). If no answer is filed in 28 days, the court can treat the case as uncontested and decide it on your spouse's evidence (Local Rule 14.4).

COURT	FEE	ANSWER DEADLINE	CASE TYPE
Common Pleas (DR)	\$350 / \$400 with kids	28 days	DR

TWO WORDS PEOPLE MIX UP

“Uncontested” divorce is not a dissolution.

In Fairfield County, an uncontested divorce is the default-style case under Local Rule 14.4 — your spouse didn't answer or can't be found, so the court grants the divorce on your evidence. A dissolution is different: it is a fully agreed joint filing with no one being served. If you can't locate your spouse, you can serve by posting (if you qualify as low-income) or by newspaper publication.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

What do I fill out, and where do I get it?

Fairfield County uses the Ohio Supreme Court uniform forms for the core divorce and dissolution paperwork, plus a short set of its own local forms. Remember: single-sided paper only.

FORM (TAP TO OPEN)	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Uniform Domestic Relations Forms — Divorce set https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court (uniform forms)	Complaint for Divorce with or without children, Answer, and Counterclaim
Personal Identifier Form https://www.co.fairfield.oh.us/dr/pdf/Personal-Identifier-Form-12.2020-Fillable.pdf	Fairfield County DR (forms page)	Keeps SSNs and similar private data off the public file
Affidavit 1 — Basic Information, Income, and Expenses https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court (uniform forms)	Required where income, assets, or debts are at issue (Local Rule 2.4)
Affidavit 2 — Property and Debt https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court (uniform forms)	Filed together with Affidavit 1
Parenting Proceeding Affidavit https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court (uniform forms)	Required with children — where they've lived and any other cases
Child Support Computation Worksheet https://ohiochildsupportcalculator.ohio.gov/home.html	Ohio child-support calculator	Builds the guideline support number
Fairfield County Standard Mutual Restraining Order https://www.co.fairfield.oh.us/dr/documents/restraining_order.pdf	Fairfield County DR	The order that issues automatically when a divorce is filed
Dissolution & Divorce Document Checklist https://www.co.fairfield.oh.us/dr/documents/Dissolution-and-Divorce-Document-Checklist.pdf	Fairfield County DR	The county's own list of what your packet must include

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

What does a Fairfield County divorce look like?

Most divorces settle. The steps below are the path the court sets in motion once you file, whether or not you ever reach a trial.

WHEN DIVORCE IS THE RIGHT TOOL
 You need a deadline, a temporary order, information, or a judge's decision.
 Divorce is often the necessary path when a spouse won't sign, money is unclear, parenting time is disputed, or someone needs the court to act before everything is settled.

Answer deadline	28 days after service
Turn in the decree	within 90 days of the hearing
Decree rule	spouses list different addresses
Extensions	none on the 90-day rule

1 **File and pay (or ask to waive the fee)**
 File the complaint and Personal Identifier Form with the DR Clerk and pay the deposit, or file a poverty affidavit if you can't afford it.

2 **A restraining order issues automatically**
 On filing, the court enters a mutual restraining order (Local Rule 9.3). It can't decide custody — it just keeps things stable.

3 **Serve your spouse**
 Service is by certified mail first, then options like the sheriff. If an address is unknown, serve by posting or newspaper publication.

4 **Parenting class, if you have children**
 Finish Children In Between online (\$25) and file the certificate. No decree with children is signed without it (Rules 12 and 22.4).

5 **Settle or go to hearing**
 Contested cases move through pretrial and a settlement conference; if unresolved, a judge or magistrate decides. Uncontested cases are heard on your evidence.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

Legal separation and annulment: the other two doors.

Not every case is a divorce. Two less-common paths solve different problems, and both are heard in Domestic Relations.

Legal separation (R.C. 3105.17)

A court divides property, sets support, and orders parenting — but you stay legally married. People choose it for religious, insurance, or financial reasons, or as a step short of divorce. It can later be followed by a divorce or dissolution.

Annulment (R.C. 3105.31)

A court declares a marriage void or voidable on a specific legal ground — such as bigamy, being underage without consent, fraud, or incapacity. It is not granted just because a marriage was short or unhappy.

DON'T CONFUSE TWO SIMILAR TERMS

“Legal separation” is a status; a “Separation Agreement” is a document.

Legal separation is a court case that leaves you married. A Separation Agreement is the signed settlement used in a dissolution (and often a divorce). The fee in Fairfield County is \$300 without children, \$350 with children, for either annulment or legal separation. The 28-day answer rule applies if the case is uncontested.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

Temporary orders and emergencies while you wait.

A case can take months. Temporary orders set the rules for support, the home, and the children in the meantime. True emergencies have their own, stricter path.

Temporary (pendente lite) orders

File a motion for temporary support or parenting with accurate financial affidavits, last year's tax return, and current pay information; support requests include a worksheet. These are usually decided without a live hearing (Local Rule 9.1).

What a restraining order can't do.

The standard mutual restraining order and any exclusive-occupancy order can't hand you custody. As to children, they only bar removing them from the area or changing their school. A motion to make a spouse leave the home needs a real showing, like violence or threats.

THE LOCAL RULE THAT TRIPS PEOPLE UP

Emergency custody must be filed two ways at once.

Ex parte custody orders are discouraged and granted only on a showing of irreparable harm, backed by affidavits (Local Rule 8.6). Critically, the ex parte motion must be filed together with a Motion to Reallocate Parental Rights — if it isn't, the court won't even consider the emergency request.

If emergency relief is granted	full hearing within 14 days
Backed by	sworn affidavits, not argument
False statements	can mean sanctions and fees

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

Unmarried parents: parentage, then custody — in DR.

This is the section where Fairfield County differs most from the rest of Ohio. If you were never married to your child's other parent, your custody, parenting-time, and support case is heard in Domestic Relations, not Juvenile.

ROUTING ALERT

File in Domestic Relations, not Juvenile.

By standing agreement between the courts, parentage and unmarried-parent custody, parenting time, and support are Domestic Relations matters here (a “PA” case under Local Rules 2.3 and 30). The Juvenile Court takes a custody case only when custody is being transferred to a non-relative. This is the opposite of the usual Ohio default, so confirm before you file.

Step one: establish parentage

Parentage is the legal parent-child link (R.C. Chapter 3111). It can be set by an Acknowledgment of Paternity, by CSEA genetic testing, or by a court parentage case. Establishing parentage opens the door to support; it does not by itself decide custody.

Step two: ask for custody

Once parentage is set, the court allocates custody as sole custody (one residential parent and legal custodian) or shared parenting (both parents are legal custodian under an approved plan), sets parenting time, and orders support. Ohio has no “primary” or “joint” custody.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

Forms for an unmarried-parent case.

These are filed in the DR Division, with the Personal Identifier Form and — where money is at issue — the income and property affidavits.

FORM (TAP TO OPEN)	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Complaint to Establish the Parent-Child Relationship (SF 23 / JF 2) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form23.pdf	Ohio Supreme Court (uniform forms)	Starts a parentage case when paternity is not yet established
Uniform forms — Custody, Parenting Time, and Support https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court (uniform forms)	Asks the DR Court to allocate custody and set parenting time and support
Personal Identifier Form https://www.co.fairfield.oh.us/dr/pdf/Personal-Identifier-Form-12.2020-Fillable.pdf	Fairfield County DR	Keeps private identifiers off the public record
Standard Parenting Time Order — Local Rule 17 (current) https://www.co.fairfield.oh.us/dr/pdf/Local-Rule-17-rev-2023.03.01.pdf	Fairfield County DR	The default parenting-time schedule unless you agree otherwise
Child Support Computation Worksheet https://ohiochildsupportcalculator.ohio.gov/home.html	Ohio child-support calculator	Builds the guideline support number
SETS — Child Support Information Form https://www.co.fairfield.oh.us/dr/documents/sets-form.pdf	Fairfield County DR	Opens the CSEA support record

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

Parenting time and grandparent companionship.

“Parenting time” is the schedule a parent has with a child. “Companionship” is the separate, narrower time a grandparent or relative may be granted. They are not the same thing.

The default schedule: Local Rule 17

Unless parents agree otherwise, Fairfield County's Standard Parenting Time Order sets the schedule. It has a local plan (within 150 miles), a long-distance plan (over 150 miles), and a special infant schedule for children up to 18 months, plus detailed holiday and break allocations. Always use the current version (decided on or after March 1, 2023).

A FAIRFIELD COUNTY RESOURCE

The Visitation Center.

For supervised parenting time or supervised exchanges, the DR Court runs a Visitation Center at 407 E. Main Street, Lancaster.

Grandparent and relative companionship

Non-parents do not have automatic rights. A grandparent or certain relatives may ask for companionship under R.C. 3109.11 (when a parent has died) or R.C. 3109.12 (children of unmarried parents). The court weighs the child's best interest; it is not granted just because a relationship exists.

Companionship is a non-parent right.

It is decided separately from a parent's parenting time, and it is filed in the court that has the child's custody case — usually Domestic Relations here.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

Child support: how the number is built.

Ohio uses an income-shares model: both parents' incomes go into a statewide worksheet that estimates what the household would have spent on the child, then splits it by income share.

What goes into the math

Both parents' gross incomes, work-related child-care, health-insurance cost, and the number of children. Spending about 90 or more overnights a year can adjust the number. The Fairfield County CSEA can also set up and enforce the order.

RUN YOUR OWN NUMBERS FIRST

Estimate before you negotiate.

Walking in with a realistic figure changes the conversation. Gavvl Law has a free Ohio child-support estimator you can use before any filing or hearing:

gavvl.com/child-support-calculator

(<https://gavvl.com/child-support-calculator>).

Model	Income shares (both incomes)
Set or enforced by	DR Court or CSEA
Review	every 36 months or on a big change
Ends	at 18 and graduation, or 19

A guideline number, not a guess.

The worksheet result is the presumed correct amount. A court can deviate, but only with reasons on the record.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

After the order: changing it, enforcing it, moving.

Three different jobs live here, and they use different standards. Keeping them straight is half the battle.

Change it (modify)

Support changes on a financial change; parenting time changes on best interest; changing the residential parent or moving between sole custody and shared parenting needs a real change in circumstances (R.C. 3109.04(E)). School placement is a separate, administrative question.

Enforce it (contempt)

If the other person ignores a support, parenting-time, or property term, a Motion for Contempt asks the court to enforce it. Post-decree motions are watched for service and can be dismissed if service isn't completed within 45 days.

Register or relocate

An out-of-state order can be registered here to enforce or change it. A residential parent who plans to move must file the county's Notice of Intent to Relocate so the other parent can respond.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

Motions for after the order.

For most post-decree changes, Fairfield County points you to the Ohio Supreme Court uniform motions; relocation and objections use county forms.

FORM (TAP TO OPEN)	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Motion for Change of Parental Rights / Custody (SF 27 / JF 6) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form27.pdf	Ohio Supreme Court (uniform forms)	Asks to change the residential parent or custody arrangement
Motion for Change of Child Support (SF 28 / JF 7) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form28.pdf	Ohio Supreme Court (uniform forms)	Asks to change child support or related expenses
Motion for Change of Parenting Time (SF 26 / JF 5) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form26.pdf	Ohio Supreme Court (uniform forms)	Asks to change the parenting-time schedule
Motion for Contempt (SF 24 / JF 3) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form24.pdf	Ohio Supreme Court (uniform forms)	Enforces an order the other person is violating
Notice of Residential Parent's Intent to Relocate https://www.co.fairfield.oh.us/dr/documents/relocation_for_m.pdf	Fairfield County DR	Required notice before a residential parent moves
Objection to Magistrate's Decision https://www.co.fairfield.oh.us/dr/pdf/Objection-to-Magistrates-Decision.pdf	Fairfield County DR	Asks the judge to review a magistrate's decision

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

Objections and appeals: review, not a redo.

If a magistrate decides your case, or a judge enters a final order you disagree with, there are deadlines to ask for review. They are short, and missing them usually ends the issue.

FIRST LEVEL

Objecting to a magistrate's decision

A magistrate handles many DR matters. You generally have 14 days to file written objections asking the judge to review the decision; the county publishes an objection form. The judge then reviews what the magistrate did — it is not a fresh trial.

Then: appeal to the Court of Appeals

To appeal a final judgment, you generally have 30 days to file a notice of appeal (App.R. 4). An appeal reviews the record for legal error; you do not get to re-argue the facts or add new evidence.

Deadlines run from the entry, not your mood.

The clock starts when the decision or judgment is filed. If you think something went wrong, move quickly — these windows do not pause while you decide.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

Protection orders when you are not safe.

A Domestic Violence Civil Protection Order (R.C. 3113.31) is a civil order that can require someone to stay away. In Fairfield County these are filed in Domestic Relations, and there is never a filing fee.

How it works

File the petition during business hours — to be heard the same day, file by 3:00 p.m. Bring the other person's name, address, and date of birth. The court holds a first (ex parte) hearing; no order issues without a hearing. A full hearing follows, and a final order can last up to five years.

If children are involved, address parenting time.

Local Rule 7.3 warns that a petition involving children should propose a parenting-time schedule or explain why visitation should be denied — leaving it blank can lead the court to deny that part of the order. Mediation is never used for a protection order.

FREE HELP IN LANCASTER

A victim advocate can sit with you.

The Lighthouse, Inc. provides a protection-order advocate (not a lawyer) who can answer questions and attend hearings: 740-687-6778, ext. 3027.

Filing fee	none, ever
File by	3:00 p.m. for a same-day hearing
Bring	name, address, date of birth
Final order	up to 5 years

FORM (TAP TO OPEN)	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
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[Petition for a Domestic Violence Civil Protection Order](#)

<https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/protection-order/2>

Ohio Supreme Court (protection-order forms)

Asks the court to order a family or household member to stay away

[Petition for a Dating Violence Civil Protection Order](#)

<https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/protection-order/2>

Ohio Supreme Court (protection-order forms)

For protection from a person in a dating relationship

△ Heads up: There is no filing fee for a protection order. A victim advocate can help you complete the petition.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

Dividing property, and protecting your case.

Ohio divides marital property and debt equitably — fairly, which is not always equally. A few day-to-day habits protect you while any of the paths above plays out.

Marital vs. separate

Marital property and debt is generally what was acquired during the marriage; separate property includes pre-marriage assets, gifts, and inheritances kept separate. Timing and tracing matter. Retirement accounts are often divided by a special order (a QDRO or DOPO).

Do

- Keep communication in writing, and save it.
- Gather financial records: accounts, statements, debts.
- Put the children's needs first, and your own second.

Don't

- Don't post about your case or your spouse online.
- Don't use the children as messengers.
- Don't drain accounts or cancel insurance — it can violate the restraining order.

NOT SURE WHICH PATH IS YOURS?

Take the 2-minute quiz — it routes you to the right starting point.

Dissolution, divorce, an unmarried-parent custody case, or just a consult? Gavvl's Find My Service quiz gives a personalized recommendation in about two minutes. [Take the quiz](https://gavvl.com/find-my-service) (https://gavvl.com/find-my-service) · Call (844) 694-2885.

PART TWO

Juvenile Court: a narrow but important role.

Because Domestic Relations handles parent custody here, the Juvenile Division does just two family-law jobs: custody going to a non-relative, and abuse, neglect, or dependency cases. Both sit on the 3rd floor.

COURT	WHERE	JUDGE	PHONE
Juvenile (with Probate)	Hall of Justice, 3rd FL.	Terre L. Vandervoort	740-652-7463

WHAT DOES NOT COME HERE

Custody between parents is a DR matter.

If both sides are parents — married or not — the custody case is heard in Domestic Relations, not Juvenile. The Juvenile Court takes a custody case only when custody is being transferred to someone who is not the child's parent.

JUVENILE COURT

When a relative or non-parent is raising the child.

When a child can't safely or appropriately live with a parent, a relative or other suitable caretaker can ask the Juvenile Court for legal custody. This is the one custody category Fairfield County routes to Juvenile.

WHO THIS IS FOR

Grandparents and other caretakers.

If a grandchild or a related child already lives with you and you need legal authority — for school, medical care, and daily decisions — this is the path.

It starts out temporary.

The default grant under Rule 4.1 is one year. Plan ahead for the renewal so there is no gap in your authority.

1**Get the packet**

Ask the Juvenile Clerk's office for the non-relative temporary-custody form packet (Juvenile Rule 4.1).

2**File the request**

File with the Juvenile Division. The fee is \$300, which includes the home-study deposit.

3**Home investigation**

The court may send an investigator to visit the home of the person asking for custody.

4**Hearing and order**

If everyone agrees and all consents and documents are in, the court can decide on the papers and grant temporary custody for one year. Missing documents mean an in-person hearing everyone must attend.

5**Renew before it expires**

Temporary custody lasts one year. File to extend it, with signed consents, before it runs out, or the court will set a hearing.

JUVENILE COURT

When Children Services is involved.

When a child may be abused, neglected, or dependent, Fairfield County Job & Family Services investigates and, if needed, files a case in Juvenile Court. The process is built to protect the child while working toward a safe, permanent home.

The stages, in plain order

1. A report comes in; the agency investigates.
2. If a child is removed, a shelter-care hearing happens quickly.
3. Adjudication: the court decides if the child is abused, neglected, or dependent.
4. Disposition: the court sets placement and a case plan.
5. Reviews and a permanency hearing follow until there is a lasting outcome.

You may have a lawyer, and the child has a GAL.

If you qualify financially, the court appoints counsel for a parent, and a Guardian ad Litem represents the child's best interest throughout the case.

REPORT FIRST IF A CHILD IS AT RISK

Who to call.

Fairfield County Protective Services:
740-652-7887 (24/7). After hours, the Sheriff:
740-652-7900. Statewide: 1-855-642-4453.
Emergency: 911.

THESE CASES ARE HARD – YOU DON'T HAVE TO FACE THEM ALONE

Support exists for the difficult parts.

If there is violence, instability, or a child-welfare case in the mix, the court appoints counsel for those who qualify, protection orders cost nothing to file, and the resources on the disclosures page are there for a reason.

PART THREE

Probate Court: stepparent and kinship adoption.

Adoption permanently makes an adult the legal parent of a child. In Fairfield County it is filed in the Probate Division, which shares a judge and a courtroom floor with Juvenile.

COURT	WHERE	STEPARENT FEE	ADULT FEE
Probate (with Juvenile)	Hall of Justice, 3rd FL.	\$200 deposit	\$300 deposit

TWO TRUTHS ABOUT ADOPTION

It is permanent, and it is not the same as custody.

Custody arranges care and can be changed; adoption permanently ends one legal parent relationship and creates another. In Ohio, unmarried people cannot adopt together. A home study is required for stepparent and private adoptions, and its cost varies by the vendor you use.

PROBATE COURT

What a Fairfield County adoption involves.

The Probate Division uses the Ohio standard adoption forms, and the county publishes a checklist for each kind of adoption. The biggest local trap is what must be filed on day one.

THE DAY-ONE TRAP**No registry checks, no filing.**

Fairfield's Probate Court will not accept an adoption petition unless the child-abuse registry check is filed with it (and a putative-father registry check where required). Build these into your very first step.

Use the right checklist.

The county publishes separate checklists for stepparent, kinship/private, adult, and foreign adoptions. Pick the one that matches your situation before you start.

1**File the petition — with two registry checks**

File Form 18.0 (Petition for Adoption of a Minor). The ODJFS child-abuse registry check must be filed with the petition in every case, plus a putative-father registry check where required. Without them, the court won't accept the filing (Local Rule 78.5).

2**Address consent**

The petition covers the biological parent's consent (Form 18.3) and the limited exceptions where consent is not required (R.C. 3107.06–.07; Form 18.4), such as a year without justifiable support or contact.

3**Complete the home study**

Required for stepparent and private adoptions. With all documents and proofs of service, it must be on file no later than 10 court days before the hearing, or the hearing is continued.

4**Attend the hearing**

In an uncontested adoption the court combines consent and best-interest into one hearing (the child is usually present). Contested-consent cases may be split into two hearings.

5**Final decree**

The court enters an interlocutory order and/or the final decree of adoption (Forms 18.5–18.7), after which an amended birth record can issue.

PROBATE COURT

Adoption forms.

Fairfield County publishes its own printable versions of the standard Ohio adoption forms. The two registry checks are filed with the petition.

FORM (TAP TO OPEN)	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Form 18.0 — Petition for Adoption of a Minor https://www.fairfieldcountyprobate.com/pdf/FC-FORM-18.0-Petition-for-Adoption-of-Minor.pdf	Fairfield County Probate	Starts a stepparent or kinship adoption
Form 18.3 — Consent to Adoption https://www.fairfieldcountyprobate.com/pdf/FC-FORM-18.3-Consent-to-Adoption.pdf	Fairfield County Probate	A parent's written consent to the adoption
Form 18.4 — Judgment Entry Finding Consent Not Required https://www.fairfieldcountyprobate.com/pdf/FC-FORM-18.4-Judgment-Entry-Finding-Consent-Not-Required.pdf	Fairfield County Probate	Used when the court finds a parent's consent is not required
Form 18.6 — Final Decree of Adoption (after interlocutory) https://www.fairfieldcountyprobate.com/pdf/FC-FORM-18.6-Final-Decree-of-Adoption-After-Interlocutory.pdf	Fairfield County Probate	The final order completing the adoption
Step-Parent Adoption Checklist https://www.fairfieldcountyprobate.com/pdf/Adoption-Step-Parent-Adoption-Checklist.html	Fairfield County Probate	The county's full list of what a stepparent adoption needs

⚠ Heads up: A child-abuse registry check must be filed with the petition, plus a putative-father registry check where required, or the court won't accept the filing (Local Rule 78.5).

THINKING ABOUT AN ADOPTION OR A CUSTODY CHANGE?

Talk it through before you file.

Adoption and custody cases turn on consent, notice, and timing — the kinds of details where early advice saves months. Gavvl's quiz points you to the right service in about two minutes. [Take the quiz](#)

(<https://gavvl.com/find-my-service>) • Call (844) 694-2885.

PART FOUR

How Gavvl Law can help.

This guide gave you the map. If you'd like a hand from here, here is what working with Gavvl looks like — and the two ways we usually help.

Limited-scope (flat fee)

You handle parts of your own case and hire us for specific tasks at a flat, agreed price — reviewing a Separation Agreement, preparing a filing packet, coaching you for a hearing, or drafting a parenting plan. Predictable cost, right-sized help.

Full representation

We handle the whole matter — strategy, filings, temporary orders, negotiation, and hearings — on a retainer plus hourly basis. Best when a case is contested, complex, or moving fast and you want someone carrying it.

Divorce & dissolution

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

Custody & parenting

Unmarried-parent and married cases, shared parenting plans, schedules, and modifications.

Child support

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

Adoption

Stepparent and kinship adoption planning, consent review, and packet preparation.

PART FOUR

Ways to pay, and how to start.

The options depend on the service model, because Ohio trust-accounting rules treat retainers differently from flat fees. Exact amounts are calculated when you enroll.

RETAINER + HOURLY**Full representation**

Pay in full by secure card (Confido Legal). Affirm financing is available — monthly payments with a soft credit check that doesn't affect your score.

FLAT FEE**Limited-scope**

Pay in full by card (Confido Legal). Affirm, Klarna, or PayPal Pay Later. Or Gavvl Direct — our in-house plan with no credit check.

NO CREDIT CHECK**Gavvl Direct**

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

NOT SURE WHICH PATH FITS?

The 2-minute quiz gives a personalized recommendation.

Find My Service asks a few questions and suggests a service and financing option. [Take the quiz](#)

(<https://gavvl.com/find-my-service>) · [Start here](#) (<https://gavvl.com/start>) · (844) 694-2885 · support@gavvl.com.

Consultations are low-cost.

WHY FAMILIES CHOOSE GAVVL

A 4.8+ average across 90+ verified Google reviews, recognized by Best Lawyers as a “Firm to Watch” (2026), with 50+ years of combined family-law experience across all 88 Ohio counties. (See the disclosures page — awards and ratings are not a prediction about your case.)

IMPORTANT DISCLOSURES

The fine print, in plain English.

Please read this before relying on anything in this guide.

Information, not legal advice.

This guide explains how things generally work in Fairfield County, but it can't account for the facts of your situation. 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 case, talk with a licensed Ohio attorney.

About awards and reviews.

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.

Fees and procedures change.

Court fees, forms, and procedures change. The information in this guide was verified as of June 17, 2026 from official court sources. Always confirm current fees and requirements with the Fairfield County Clerk of Courts or the relevant court before you file.

Jurisdiction and responsibility.

Gavvl Law attorneys are licensed to practice law in Ohio. This guide describes Ohio law and Fairfield County procedure only. Advertising material, Gavvl Law LLC. Attorney responsible for this content: Stephanie Green, Esq., Managing Partner. Privacy policy:

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READY WHEN YOU ARE.

Take the 2-minute quiz or talk with our team.

We'll help you identify the right Fairfield County court, the likely path, and the level of help that fits the moment.

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