

PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

Family Law in Lake County

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

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- 01** See which of Lake County's three family courts hears your case.

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

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

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

START HERE

Use this guide like a map, not a rulebook.

Family law gets easier once you name a few things: the court, the path, the paperwork, and your next step. This guide is built on those questions for Lake County.

01

Which court handles this?

The Domestic Relations Division hears divorce and dissolution. The Juvenile Division handles custody for unmarried parents. The Probate Court handles adoption. In Lake County, all three are separate courts.

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 Lake 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 THE FIRST PAPERS

Lake County e-files case-starting papers through the Clerk of Courts. Some proposed entries are mailed or hand-delivered to the court at least 7 days before a hearing. 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. Lake County has three separate family courts, each with its own judge and address. Start with the relationship, and with what you need a judge to decide.

MARRIED OR FORMERLY MARRIED

Domestic Relations

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

WHO HEARS IT

Judge Colleen A. Falkowski.

PARENTS NEVER MARRIED

Juvenile Division

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

WHO HEARS IT

Judge Michael L. DeLeone.

ADOPTION

Probate Court

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

WHO HEARS IT

Judge Mark J. Bartolotta.

Three courts, three judges

The Domestic Relations Division is at 47 North Park Place, the Juvenile Division at 53 East Erie Street, and the Probate Court files by mail to P.O. Box 490, all in Painesville. Each is its own court with its own forms and fees, so file with the right one for your case.

PART ONE

The Domestic Relations Division ends marriages.

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

WITH CHILDREN	WITHOUT CHILDREN	ANNULMENT	RESIDENCY
\$326	\$306	\$276	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, dissolution, or legal separation costs \$326 with children and \$306 without. An annulment is \$276. The deposit goes toward your real costs, and court costs are settled 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. You e-file the first papers with the Clerk. 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. The decree is provided at the hearing and must show full disclosure of property, income, and debts.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Case Designation Sheet https://lcdrct.org/forms-filings/	Lake County DR forms	Filed with your first papers
Petition for Dissolution + Waiver https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Both spouses sign; opens the joint case
Separation Agreement https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Your signed terms; notarize this first
Affidavit of Income, Expenses & Property https://lcdrct.org/forms-filings/	Lake County DR forms	Each spouse files one
Affidavit Regarding Parenting https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; the UCCJEA affidavit
Decree of Dissolution https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	The judgment the court signs

WITH A CHILD UNDER 16**The parenting class**

If you have a child under 16, both spouses take the online Children in Between class and file the certificate before the final hearing. Schedule it within 60 days of filing the dissolution.

FREE MEDIATION

If a parenting issue comes up, Lake County's in-house Mediation Department helps parents work it out at no cost. Mediation is never used to decide a protection order, and children do not attend.

DIVORCE

Filing a divorce when you do not agree.

Divorce is e-filed with the Clerk of Courts and heard by the Domestic Relations Division. Lake uses the Ohio Supreme Court forms plus local affidavits. The financial affidavit goes in with the Complaint.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Complaint for Divorce https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Starts the lawsuit; with or without children
Affidavit of Income, Expenses & Property https://lcdrct.org/forms-filings/	Lake County DR forms	Required with the complaint
Affidavit Regarding Parenting https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; the UCCJEA affidavit
Civil Rule 75 temporary motion https://lcdrct.org/forms-filings/	Lake County DR forms	File if you want orders during the case
Child support worksheet https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With temporary or final support

A restraining order on filing

When you file for divorce, the court issues a mutual restraining order on assets and financial accounts, served with the complaint. It keeps either spouse from moving or hiding money while the case runs.

IF YOU CANNOT FIND YOUR SPOUSE

Service can be by publication if the other spouse cannot be found, with the court's approval. The notice runs weekly for six weeks, and the answer is due within 28 days after publication.

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.

The 14-day rule

You file a Civil Rule 75 temporary motion on the court forms. For temporary child support, attach a proposed support worksheet. A response to a motion is due 14 days after it is filed.

Emergency orders

An ex parte order takes a written motion and an affidavit showing grounds and a risk of real harm. If the court denies it, the matter is set for a hearing within 28 days.

ASKING A SPOUSE TO LEAVE THE HOME

The court grants exclusive use of the home only when the other spouse has been gone for at least 30 days in a row, or in a domestic violence case. For protection from violence, a protection order is the faster, fee-free tool. If anyone is in danger right now, call 911.

CHILDREN

Custody, parenting time, and the parenting class.

Ohio uses specific words for custody. Lake County also has a detailed default schedule and a required class for parents of younger children.

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 Children in Between class

When a case involves a child under 16, both parents take the online Children in Between class before the final hearing, and file the certificate. Schedule it within 60 days of filing.

CHILD SUPPORT RUNS THROUGH THE CSEA

The Lake County child support agency handles support. Reach it at (440) 918-4000. Support is collected by income withholding, and paid through the state, not directly between parents.

THE REST OF A DIVORCE

Spousal support, property, and other paths.

Beyond custody and child support, a divorce sorts out spousal support and divides what you own and owe.

Spousal support

The court can order one spouse to support the other for a set time. Ohio weighs income, the length of the marriage, health, and other factors. There is no fixed formula.

Property and debt

Ohio divides marital property and debt fairly. Fair does not always mean a 50-50 split. Property you brought into the marriage may count as separate.

Legal separation and annulment

Both are filed in the Domestic Relations Division. Legal separation uses the same deposit as a divorce; annulment is \$276 and has narrow grounds.

A note on retirement accounts

If a divorce divides a retirement account, it usually takes a separate order, a QDRO or a DOPO, to split it with the plan. Lake County charges just \$50 for one after the decree. Getting the wording right matters, so many people use a lawyer for this step.

AFTER THE DECREE

Changing or enforcing a Lake County order.

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

CUSTODY OR SUPPORT MOTION**\$200**

To change custody, parenting time, or support after the decree

OTHER POST-DECREE MOTION**\$175**

For other post-decree issues

QDRO OR DOPO**\$50**

To split a retirement account named in the decree

Modifying and enforcing

To change custody or support, you file a post-decree motion in your original case. A reallocation, support, or parenting-time motion is \$200. To enforce an order, you can file a show-cause motion with an affidavit.

MOVING WITH THE CHILDREN

Parenting orders include a relocation notice. A parent who plans to move should follow Ohio's relocation rules before moving. Ask the Domestic Relations Division at (440) 350-2708 about the steps.

HELP ALONG THE WAY

Mediation, GALs, and the parenting class.

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

Free mediation

Lake County has an in-house Mediation Department that helps parents reach a parenting agreement at no cost. It is never used for a domestic violence case or 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. The rate is \$125 an hour, and the court decides who pays.

The parenting class

The online Children in Between class 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 Lake County.

Find My Service · gavvl.com/find-my-service

Get started · gavvl.com/start

Call · (844) 694-2885

Email · support@gavvl.com

PROTECTION ORDERS

When safety comes first.

A domestic violence civil protection order (DVCPO) can order someone to stay away. It can also set temporary custody and support. Your safety drives the timeline.

FILING FEE	WHERE	EX PARTE ORDER	PRIVACY
\$0 to petitioner	DR Division	Same day	Off the online docket

How it works here
 DVCPO petitions are available from the Clerk and online, with no filing fee, under R.C. 3113.31. They are heard in the Domestic Relations Division. For privacy, domestic violence cases are kept off the online docket.

Support and the hearing
 The court can issue a same-day ex parte order, then set a full hearing. Lake County's Victim's Assistance Program at (440) 350-2691 can help and advocate for you through the process.

IF YOU ARE IN DANGER NOW
 If you or your children are in danger right now, call 911. A protection order is a civil court process, not an emergency response.

PART TWO

The Juvenile Division is for parents who were never married.

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

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
Complaint for Custody and Parentage https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Sets parentage, custody, parenting time
Parenting Proceeding Affidavit https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Required with a custody filing
Child support worksheet https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Required when support is at issue
IV-D application https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Juvenile Division or CSEA	Sets up the support case with the agency

COSTS AND FILING

The Juvenile Division is at 53 East Erie Street, (440) 350-3000. A new custody, visitation, or parentage case costs \$200 to file. Most other new juvenile cases cost \$125, and a counterclaim is \$75.

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. To bring in an order from another state, a foreign-order filing is \$15. Support changes can also start through the agency at (440) 918-4000.

Abuse, neglect, and dependency

These CPS cases are heard in the Juvenile Division. The court can appoint a guardian ad litem for the children. Low-income parents may ask for an appointed lawyer. For immediate danger, call 911.

A NOTE ON OBJECTING TO A SUPPORT ORDER

If you disagree with a child support agency administrative order, you can object to it in the Juvenile Division for a \$50 fee. There are deadlines to object, so act promptly and ask the court how much time you have.

PART THREE

Adoption is handled by the Probate Court.

Stepparent and kinship adoptions go to the separate Probate Court, before Judge Bartolotta. Lake County asks for one unusual thing.

YOU WILL NEED FIVE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Lake County requires five letters of recommendation for an adoption, and no more than two may come from relatives. Address them to Judge Bartolotta, seal each one separately, and submit them with your paperwork. Start gathering them early.

ADOPTION**\$394**

Plus \$40 for each additional child of the same parents

PAY BY**Cash/check**

Cash, check, or money order only

THEN ADD**Service costs**

Background check, mailing, and any publication

1**File the petition and letters**

Mail the Petition for Adoption, a certified birth certificate, notarized consents, and the five letters to Probate at P.O. Box 490, (440) 350-2563.

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 assessment**

A court-appointed assessor interviews the household. You contact the assessor, and each petitioner completes a background check before the hearing.

4**Attend the hearing**

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

PART FOUR

How Gavvl Law can help in Lake County.

Gavvl is a modern Ohio family-law firm serving all 88 counties. We pair skilled lawyers with easy-to-use tech and clear pricing. You choose how much help you need.

FULL REPRESENTATION

An attorney handles the whole case

From the first consult through final orders: strategy, every filing, all court dates, and negotiating. Best for contested, complex, or high-conflict cases. Billed as a retainer plus hourly fees.

LIMITED-SCOPE (FLAT FEE)

Hire us for specific tasks

Pay a flat fee per service — drafting and filing, one hearing, advice, or document review. Best for uncontested cases and tighter budgets. Not built for high-conflict cases that need steady advocacy.

Ways to pay

Your options depend on the service model. Limited-scope work has the widest range: pay in full, Affirm, Klarna, or PayPal Pay Later. Gavvl Direct is an in-house plan with no credit check. Financed amounts carry 19% annual interest, compounded monthly. We work out your exact payment when you enroll.

START IN TWO MINUTES

Take the Find My Service quiz at gavvl.com/find-my-service. You get a recommendation and your payment options. Or call (844) 694-2885. Consultations are low-cost.

BEFORE YOU GO

Important disclosures.

Please read these notes about how to use this guide.

INFORMATION, NOT LEGAL ADVICE

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FEES AND PROCEDURES CHANGE

The court information in this guide was verified as of May 2026 from official court sources. Court fees, forms, and procedures change. Always confirm current fees and requirements with the Lake 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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