

PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

Family Law in Mercer County

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

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- 01** See how Mercer County splits family law across two courts.

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

 - 03** Find the right local form, the deposit, and the 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 Mercer County.

01

Which court handles this?

Married couples file divorce or dissolution in the Common Pleas Court. Unmarried parents file custody in the Juvenile Court. Adoptions go to the Probate Court. Two judges share one courthouse here.

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 Mercer 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.

A REQUIRED PARENTING CLASS

In a divorce or dissolution with minor children, both parents must take the county's A-OK Parenting Program before the final hearing. It is a single evening session and costs \$30.

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.

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

Use this guide like a map, not a rulebook.	2
Which court is actually handling your case?	4
Divorce and dissolution run through the Common Pleas Court.	5
The dissolution packet, step by step.	6
Filing a divorce when you do not agree.	8
Getting orders while the case runs.	9
Custody, the class, and child support.	10
Spousal support, property, and other paths.	11
Changing or enforcing a Mercer County order.	12
Mediation, GALs, and the class.	13
When safety comes first.	14
The Juvenile Court is for parents who were never married.	15
Filing for custody as an unmarried parent	15
Changing orders and CPS cases.	16
Adoption is handled by the Probate Court.	17
How Gavvl Law can help in Mercer County.	18
Important disclosures.	19

QUESTION ONE

Which court is actually handling your case?

One family can touch more than one court. In Mercer County two courts share the courthouse at 101 N. Main Street in Celina, under two judges. Start with the relationship, and with what you need a judge to decide.

MARRIED OR FORMERLY MARRIED

Common Pleas Court

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

WHO HEARS IT

Judge Matthew K. Fox. (419) 586-2122.

PARENTS NEVER MARRIED

Juvenile Court

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

WHO HEARS IT

Judge Matthew L. Gilmore.

ADOPTION

Probate Court

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

WHO HEARS IT

Judge Gilmore, same as Juvenile.

Two judges, one courthouse

Divorce and dissolution are heard in the Common Pleas Court before Judge Fox, and filed through the Clerk of Courts in Room 205. Unmarried-parent custody and adoption both run through the combined Probate and Juvenile Court under Judge Gilmore in Suite 307. File with the right one for your case.

PART ONE

Divorce and dissolution run through the Common Pleas Court.

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

DIVORCE	DISSOLUTION	WHERE YOU FILE	RESIDENCY
\$350	\$350	Clerk of Courts	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. The deposit is the same either way.

Dissolution is built on agreement.

Both spouses file together as co-petitioners. 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 DEPOSIT

A divorce and a dissolution each cost \$350 to file. Mercer takes cash, a money order, or a cashier's check, but no personal checks, and you can pay online. One spouse must have lived in Ohio six months.

DISSOLUTION

The dissolution packet, step by step.

Dissolution uses the Ohio Supreme Court forms plus Mercer's own local forms. Sign the Separation Agreement in front of a notary first, then build the rest of the packet around it.

FILE JOINTLY, THEN ATTEND THE HEARING

Both spouses file the joint petition with the signed Separation Agreement and pay the \$350 deposit. The hearing is held 30 to 90 days later, and both spouses must appear. With children, finish the A-OK class first.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Petition for Dissolution (UDRF 17) 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 (UDRF 19) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Your signed terms; notarize this first
DR 5 Waiver of Magistrate's Decision https://www.mercercountyoh.gov/bskpdf/dr-05-waiver-of-magistrates-decision/	Mercer DR forms	Required in the Mercer dissolution packet
DR 11 Waiver of Service of Summons https://www.mercercountyoh.gov/bskpdf/dr-11-waiver-of-service-of-summons/	Mercer DR forms	Lets you file the joint petition without service
Parenting Plan (UDRF 20 or 21) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; shared or sole plan
DR 10 IV-D Application https://www.mercercountyoh.gov/bskpdf/dr-10-iv-d-application/	Mercer DR forms	With children; required before support

REQUIRED**The A-OK class**

With children, both parents take the A-OK Parenting Program before the final hearing. It costs \$30 each. You are registered when you file, and the court mails you a date for a single evening session in Room 303.

IF YOU STOP AGREEING

A dissolution only works if both spouses agree all the way through the hearing. If you cannot agree, either spouse can convert the case to a divorce so the court can decide the open issues.

DIVORCE

Filing a divorce when you do not agree.

Divorce is filed with the Clerk of Courts in Room 205. Mercer uses the Ohio Supreme Court forms plus its own local forms, and a restraining order is filed with the complaint.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Complaint for Divorce (UDRF 6 or 7) 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
SO 1 Domestic Relations Restraint Order https://www.mercercountyoh.gov/bskpdf/so-1-dr-restraint-orders/	Mercer DR forms	Mutual order filed with the complaint
Affidavit 1 (Income & Expenses) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Your financial picture
Affidavit 3 (Parenting Proceeding) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; the UCCJEA affidavit
Affidavit 5 (Temporary Orders) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	File if you want orders during the case
DR 7 Notice to Attend A-OK https://www.mercercountyoh.gov/bskpdf/dr-07-notice-for-parenting-program-aok-2020/	Mercer DR forms	With children; the parenting-class notice

The SO 1 restraint order
 Mercer's SO 1 is a mutual restraining order filed with the divorce complaint. It keeps both spouses from things like moving marital assets, dropping insurance, or removing the children, for the length of the case.

DON'T FORGET THE CLASS
 A divorce with children also requires the A-OK class before the final hearing. You are registered when you file, so watch for the court's letter with your assigned date.

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 a parenting schedule.

How you ask

You file Affidavit 5, the motion and affidavit for temporary orders, with your income and property affidavits. The court usually decides temporary support and parenting time on the paperwork, though either party can ask for a hearing.

The 14-day rule for custody

The court will not issue a same-day custody order unless there is a true emergency backed by affidavits. Otherwise it sets temporary custody after the other parent is served and 14 days pass.

EMERGENCIES

If your situation involves a child's immediate danger, a protection order or a child-welfare referral may be the faster route than waiting on temporary orders. The SO 1 restraint order also protects assets from day one. If anyone is in danger now, call 911.

CHILDREN

Custody, the class, and child support.

Ohio uses specific words for custody. Mercer County requires the A-OK class and handles support through the county agency.

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 A-OK class

A-OK is required in a divorce or dissolution with children. It runs every other month on the 4th Tuesday, from 6 to 9 p.m., in Room 303. It costs \$30 a person, and you must stay the whole session to get a certificate.

CHILD SUPPORT RUNS THROUGH THE CSEA

The Mercer County child support agency handles support. Reach it at (419) 586-7961. Support is set under Ohio's guidelines, collected by income withholding, and paid through the state.

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 Common Pleas Court. Legal separation sets terms without ending the marriage. Annulment is rare and has narrow grounds.

A note on dividing retirement

If a divorce divides a pension or retirement account, it usually takes a separate order to split it with the plan. Getting the wording right matters, and a mistake can cost real money later, so many people use a lawyer for this step.

AFTER THE DECREE

Changing or enforcing a Mercer County order.

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

POST-DECREE MOTION**\$350**

To modify custody, support, or another order

NOTICE OF INTENT TO RELOCATE**\$100**

To tell the court a parent plans to move

MOTION TO AMEND A CPO**\$150**

To change a civil protection order

Modifying and enforcing

To change custody or support, or to enforce an order, you file a post-decree motion for \$350, using the county's motion forms. Support changes can also start through the county agency at (419) 586-7961.

MOVING WITH THE CHILDREN

A parent who plans to move files a Notice of Intent to Relocate, which costs \$100. File it ahead of time and follow Ohio's notice rules so your parenting time is protected.

HELP ALONG THE WAY

Mediation, GALs, and the class.

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

Mediation

The court offers mediation to help parents reach an agreement, using its case-management mediation forms. 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 in a contested case. A deposit of \$1,000 applies in custody and parenting-time cases.

The A-OK class

This required program teaches parents how to lower conflict and protect their children. It is a single evening session for \$30, held every other month in Room 303.

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 Mercer 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 can order someone to stay away. It can also set temporary custody and support. Your safety drives the timeline.

FILING FEE	ADULT CASES	EX PARTE ORDER	FINAL ORDER
\$0 to petitioner	Common Pleas	Same day	Up to 5 years

How it works here

A protection order against a family or household member is filed with the Clerk of Courts for the Common Pleas Court under R.C. 3113.31, with no cost deposit. A judge or magistrate holds an ex parte hearing the same day you file.

Forms and minors

Use the statewide protection-order forms. If you seek custody, add Affidavit 3; for support, add Affidavit 1. If the respondent or victim is a minor, the Juvenile Court handles the order instead.

IF YOU ARE IN DANGER NOW

If you or your children are in danger right now, call 911. The Family Crisis Network has a 24-hour line at (419) 586-1133 for shelter and protection-order help. A protection order is a civil court process, not an emergency response.

PART TWO

The Juvenile Court is for parents who were never married.

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

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 Parentage & Custody <small>https://mercercountycourts.com/juForms.php</small>	Mercer Juvenile forms	Sets parentage, custody, parenting time
Parenting Proceeding Affidavit <small>https://mercercountycourts.com/juForms.php</small>	Mercer Juvenile forms	Required with a custody filing
Financial Disclosure + worksheet <small>https://mercercountycourts.com/juForms.php</small>	Mercer Juvenile forms	When support is at issue
Application for Child Support (IV-D) <small>https://mercercountycourts.com/juForms.php</small>	Mercer Juvenile forms	Sets up the support case with the agency

THE DEPOSITS

A new custody, support, visitation, or paternity case costs \$200, plus a \$25 stenographer's fee. The Juvenile Court is in Suite 307, (419) 586-1249. The A-OK class is not ordered in Juvenile cases, only in divorce and dissolution.

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 to reactivate the case, which costs \$200. Support changes can also start through the county agency at (419) 586-7961.

Abuse, neglect, and dependency

These CPS cases are heard in the Juvenile Court. The court can appoint a guardian ad litem to speak for the child. To report concerns, call county child protection at (419) 586-5106, or 911 for danger.

KINSHIP CAREGIVERS HAVE OPTIONS

A relative caring for a child can use a Caretaker Authorization Affidavit or a Grandparent Power of Attorney, available on the Juvenile Court forms page, for short-term needs without a full custody case.

PART THREE

Adoption is handled by the Probate Court.

Stepparent and kinship adoptions go to the Probate Court, before Judge Gilmore, who also leads the Juvenile Court. Here is the basic shape.

THE DEPOSITS, AND WHO MAY ADOPT

A stepparent adoption deposit is \$220; an agency or private adoption with placement is \$325. Mercer lets stepparents, grandparents, adult siblings, custodians, and guardians adopt. The adoption packet is on the court's adoptions page.

1

File the petition in Probate

File the Ohio Petition for Adoption of a Minor with the Probate Clerk in Suite 307. Add the child's birth certificate, and a marriage certificate for a stepparent.

2

Address consent

The child's parents usually must consent. A court can excuse consent in some cases, such as a year of no contact or support without good reason. A child 12 or older also consents.

3

Complete the home study

Ohio law usually asks for a home study or assessment. A stepparent or kinship case can be simpler. Ask the Probate Clerk what your adoption type needs.

4

Attend the hearing

The court can issue an interlocutory order and then a final decree of adoption when it finds the adoption is in the child's best interest. A new birth record can follow.

PART FOUR

How Gavvl Law can help in Mercer 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 June 16, 2026 from official court sources. Court fees, forms, and procedures change. Always confirm current fees and requirements with the Mercer 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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