

PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

Family Law in Morgan County

A plain-English map for divorce, dissolution, custody, support, and adoption in McConnelsville and across Morgan County. Learn how the court works, what to file, what it costs, and when to get help.

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- 01 See how one Morgan County judge handles all family-law divisions.

 - 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 Morgan County.

01

Which division handles this?

Married couples file divorce or dissolution in the Domestic Relations Division. Unmarried parents file custody in the Juvenile Division. Adoptions go to the Probate Division. One judge leads all three.

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 Morgan 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.

FILE IN PERSON OR BY MAIL

Morgan County does not offer online filing for new family-law cases. You file in person or by mail with the Clerk. The online system only lets you look up an existing case.

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 division is actually handling your case?

One family can touch more than one part of the court. In Morgan County all three divisions sit in one courthouse at 19 East Main Street and share one judge. 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 John Wells. (740)
962-3371.

PARENTS NEVER MARRIED

Juvenile Division

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

WHO HEARS IT

Judge Wells. (740)
962-2861.

ADOPTION

Probate Division

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

WHO HEARS IT

Judge Wells. (740)
962-2861.

One judge, three divisions

Morgan County is small enough that one judge, the Hon. John Wells, hears divorce, juvenile custody, and adoption. All three divisions sit on the second floor at 19 East Main Street. You still file with the right division for your case.

PART ONE

Divorce and dissolution go to Domestic Relations.

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	NO CHILDREN	FILING	RESIDENCY
\$225	\$200	In person or mail	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.

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 or dissolution costs \$225 to file with minor children, or \$200 with none. You can ask the court to waive the deposit if you cannot afford it. One spouse must have lived in Ohio six months.

DISSOLUTION

The dissolution packet, step by step.

Morgan County uses the Ohio Supreme Court forms for divorce and dissolution. 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 deposit. The hearing is held 30 to 90 days later, and both spouses must appear and confirm the agreement is what they want.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Petition for Dissolution (SF 17) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Both spouses sign; opens the joint case
Separation Agreement (SF 19) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Your signed terms; notarize this first
Affidavit 1 (Income & Expenses) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Each spouse's finances
Affidavit 2 (Property & Debt) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	What you own and owe
Parenting plan (SF 20 or 21) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; shared or sole plan
Decree of Dissolution (SF 18) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	The judgment the court signs

GOOD TO KNOW**Is a class required?**

Morgan County does not publish a required parenting class for divorce or custody cases. A judge can still order one in a particular case, so confirm the current requirement with the court when you file.

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 Domestic Relations Division, in person or by mail. Morgan uses the Ohio Supreme Court forms, plus its own local parenting-time orders.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Complaint for Divorce (SF 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
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
Local Visitation Guidelines https://www.morgancourtsoh.gov/Media/Local-Visitation-Guidelines.pdf	Morgan parenting-time order	Default schedule, within 100 miles
Long-Distance Visitation Guidelines https://www.morgancourtsoh.gov/Media/Long-Distance-Visitation-Guidelines.pdf	Morgan parenting-time order	Default schedule, over 100 miles

The county's parenting-time orders
 Morgan County publishes its own parenting-time schedules. One is for parents who live within 100 miles of each other, and one is for parents who live farther apart. The court uses the right one as a default when parents do not agree.

FILING COSTS MORE IN SOME CASES

A contested divorce that needs service by publication adds a \$500 deposit, and a jury adds \$400. A custody investigation, if ordered, adds \$150. Plan for those if they apply.

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 a Motion for Temporary Orders, usually with Affidavit 5, so the judge can rule on the affidavits. The order can set temporary custody, parenting time, child support, spousal support, or who stays in the home until the decree.

Emergencies

For an urgent risk to a child, you can ask for an ex parte order. On a sworn showing of immediate danger, the judge can grant short-term relief the same or next business day, then set a prompt follow-up hearing.

CONFIRM THE TIMING

The other parent can file a counter-affidavit, and either side can ask for an oral hearing. Morgan County does not publish a set response or hearing deadline for temporary orders, so confirm the current timing with the court. If a child is in danger now, call 911.

CHILDREN

Custody, parenting time, and child support.

Ohio uses specific words for custody. Morgan County publishes its own parenting-time schedules 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.

Three local schedules

Morgan County has three parenting-time documents: one for parents within 100 miles, one for longer distances, and a phase-in schedule for very young children or a new parent bond. The court applies the right one when parents do not agree.

CHILD SUPPORT RUNS THROUGH THE CSEA

The Morgan County child support agency handles support. Reach the county job and family services office at (740) 962-4616. Support is set under Ohio's guidelines 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 Domestic Relations Division. 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 Morgan County order.

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

POST-DECREE MOTION**\$120**

To modify custody, support, or another order

CUSTODY INVESTIGATION**\$150**

When the court orders a home study

ANSWER OR COUNTERCLAIM**\$120**

The other party's own claim

Modifying and enforcing

To change custody or support, or to enforce an order, you file a post-decree motion for \$120, using the Ohio Supreme Court motion forms. Support changes can also start through the county agency at (740) 962-4616.

MOVING WITH THE CHILDREN

If a parent plans to move, Ohio's relocation rules require notice to the court so parenting time can be reviewed. File the notice ahead of the move and keep a copy.

HELP ALONG THE WAY

Mediation, GALs, and parenting time.

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

Mediation

The court can refer parents to mediation to help them reach an agreement on parenting and other issues. 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, or order a home investigation for \$150, to look into the children's needs in a contested case.

Parenting-time orders

The county's three published schedules give parents a clear default for holidays, weekends, and distance, which often heads off disputes before they start.

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

FILING FEE	WHERE	COVERS	FINAL ORDER
\$0 to petitioner	Common Pleas Court	Family or dating	Up to 5 years

How it works here

A protection order is filed with the Common Pleas Court under R.C. 3113.31, with no fee. It covers a family or household member, and also a dating partner. On a showing of immediate danger, the court can issue a same-day ex parte order.

Forms and a key difference

Use the statewide protection-order forms. For someone who is not a family, household, or dating partner, a stalking order is used instead; confirm with the court where to file that.

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. A final order can last up to five years.

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 Wells.

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
Parentage & Custody (SF 23 / JF 2) 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 (Aff. 3) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Required with a custody filing
Phase-In Parenting Schedule https://www.morgancocourtsoh.gov/Media/Phase-In-Parenting-Schedule.pdf	Morgan parenting-time order	For very young children or a new bond order
Grandparent Power of Attorney https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Short-term care by a grandparent

THE DEPOSIT

A new parentage, custody, or parenting-time case costs \$150. The Juvenile Division is at 19 East Main Street, (740) 962-2861. The same \$150 deposit applies to a later motion to change custody, support, or visitation.

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 for \$150. Support changes can also start through the county agency at (740) 962-4616, which charges no filing fee.

Abuse, neglect, and dependency

These CPS cases are heard in the Juvenile Division. The court can appoint a guardian ad litem to speak for the child. To report concerns, call the hotline at 1-855-642-4453, 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, both on the Ohio Supreme Court forms site, for short-term needs without a full custody case.

PART THREE

Adoption is handled by the Probate Division.

Stepparent and kinship adoptions go to the Probate Division, before Judge Wells. Morgan County has a detailed local adoption rule, so plan for a few extra steps.

AN ATTORNEY IS REQUIRED, WITH ONE EXCEPTION

Morgan County requires an attorney for adoption petitioners, except a stepparent adoption where all parents consent, which can proceed on your own. A married petitioner must be married at least a year. The deposit is \$250. The Probate rules are linked in the steps below.

1

File the petition in Probate

File the Petition for Adoption with the Probate Division and pay the \$250 deposit. The court's Probate Local Rules, including Loc.R. 75.2 on adoptions, are posted online at morgancocourts.org.

2

Address consent

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

3

Complete the checks and the home study

Criminal background checks are filed in every adoption. An assessor is appointed, and the assessor's report must be filed at least 10 days before the hearing.

4

Attend the hearing

If the court finds the adoption is in the child's best interest and consent is met, Judge Wells signs the final decree of adoption. A new birth record can follow.

PART FOUR

How Gavvl Law can help in Morgan 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 Morgan 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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