

PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

Family Law in Ottawa County

A plain-English map for divorce, dissolution, custody, support, and adoption in Port Clinton and across Ottawa 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 Ottawa County handles family law across its 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 Ottawa 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. One judge leads both Juvenile and Probate.

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 Ottawa 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.

START WITH A FULL PACKET

The Common Pleas Court posts full filing packets for divorce and dissolution, with and without children. Start there so you do not miss a form. You can file by e-mail with the Clerk.

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. In Ottawa County they share the courthouse at 315 Madison Street in Port Clinton. 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 Bruce Winters. (419) 734-6790.

PARENTS NEVER MARRIED

Juvenile Court

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

WHO HEARS IT

Judge Frederick C. Hany II.
(419) 734-6840.

ADOPTION

Probate Court

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

WHO HEARS IT

Judge Hany, same as Juvenile.

One courthouse, three roles

Divorce and dissolution are heard in the Common Pleas Court before Judge Winters, and filed through the Clerk of Courts in Room 106B. Unmarried-parent custody and adoption both run through the combined Probate and Juvenile Court under Judge Hany. All sit at 315 Madison Street.

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	FILING	RESIDENCY
\$500	\$500	E-mail or paper	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 or dissolution costs \$500 to file. A counterclaim or reopening a case is \$300, and personal service adds \$100. 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.

Ottawa County posts a full dissolution packet, plus each form on its own. 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 \$500 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
Dissolution Full Packet, children https://www.ottawacocpcourt.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Dissolution-with-Children-Full-Packet.pdf	Ottawa DR packets	Everything you need; start here
Petition for Dissolution (Form 17) https://www.ottawacocpcourt.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Form17-Petition-Dissolution-of-Marriage.pdf	Ottawa DR forms	Both spouses sign; opens the joint case
Separation Agreement (Form 19) https://www.ottawacocpcourt.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Form19-Seperation-Agreement.pdf	Ottawa DR forms	Your signed terms; notarize this first
Shared Parenting Plan (Form 20) https://www.ottawacocpcourt.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Form20-Shared-Parenting-Plan.pdf	Ottawa DR forms	With children; the parenting plan
Companionship Schedule (DR-3) https://www.ottawacocpcourt.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/DR-3-CORRECTED.pdf	Ottawa parenting-time order	With children; the default schedule
Checklist for Filing https://www.ottawacocpcourt.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Checklist-for-Filing.pdf	Ottawa DR forms	Make sure your packet is complete

GOOD TO KNOW**A class is likely**

With children, the court generally expects both parents to complete a parenting class before the case is final. The county does not post the program or cost, so confirm which class and the deadline 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 Common Pleas Clerk of Courts, by e-mail or in person. The court posts full divorce packets, so you do not have to assemble the forms yourself.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Divorce Full Packet, with children https://www.ottawacocpcourt.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Divorce-with-Children-Full-Packet.pdf	Ottawa DR packets	Everything to file with children
Divorce Full Packet, no children https://www.ottawacocpcourt.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Divorce-without-Children-Full-Packet.pdf	Ottawa DR packets	Everything to file with no children
Affidavit 5 (Temporary Orders) https://www.ottawacocpcourt.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Affidavit5-Motion-for-Temporary-Orders.pdf	Ottawa DR forms	File if you want orders during the case
Case Designation Form https://www.ottawacocpcourt.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/20210115090150552.pdf	Ottawa DR forms	Required with every case
Companionship Schedule (DR-3) https://www.ottawacocpcourt.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/DR-3-CORRECTED.pdf	Ottawa parenting-time order	The default parenting schedule
ALL DR forms https://www.ottawacocpcourt.com/domestic-relations/	Ottawa DR forms page	The court's full forms library

Start with the packet

Each divorce packet gathers the complaint, the affidavits, and the statutory notices in one place. It is the simplest way to make sure you are filing the right forms for your situation.

PLAN FOR EXTRA COSTS

A counterclaim or reopening a case costs \$300, and personal service adds \$100. If the court appoints a guardian ad litem, a deposit applies. Budget for these if they come up.

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 the 14-day cycle works

You file the Motion and Affidavit 5 for temporary orders with your income and expense affidavit. The other side has 14 days to respond with a counter-affidavit. After that, the court decides on the affidavits.

Hearings and how long it lasts

Either party can ask for an oral hearing. The temporary order stays in full force until the final judgment entry, unless the court changes it during the case.

EMERGENCIES ARE DIFFERENT

A temporary-orders motion runs on a 14-day cycle, not the same day. If a child is in immediate danger, a protection order can include stay-away and custody terms the same day, with a full hearing within 7 business days. If anyone is in danger now, call 911.

CHILDREN

Custody, parenting time, and child support.

Ohio uses specific words for custody. Ottawa County applies its own companionship schedule 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 companionship schedule

When parents do not agree, the court applies its companionship schedule, which has a long-distance version too. The schedule sets weekends, holidays, and breaks. Parents can agree to their own plan instead.

CHILD SUPPORT RUNS THROUGH THE CSEA

The Ottawa County child support agency handles support. Support is set under Ohio's guidelines, collected by income withholding, and paid through the state. Ask the agency to set up your case.

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 for the same \$500 deposit. 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 an Ottawa County order.

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

REOPEN A CASE**\$300**

The deposit for a post-decree motion

PERSONAL SERVICE**+\$100**

When the other party must be served

COUNTERCLAIM**\$300**

The other spouse's own claim

Modifying and enforcing

To change custody, parenting time, or support, you reopen the case with the matching motion form, for a \$300 deposit. All prior costs must be paid before you reopen. To enforce an order, you file a contempt motion.

MOVING WITH THE CHILDREN

If a parent plans to move, file a notice of intent to relocate so the court can review parenting time. File it ahead of the move and keep a copy for your records.

HELP ALONG THE WAY

Mediation, GALs, and parenting time.

Ottawa 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, with its own 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 and speak to their best interests in a contested case. A deposit applies.

Companionship schedule

The court's schedule gives parents a clear default for weekends, holidays, 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 Ottawa 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	EX PARTE ORDER	FINAL ORDER
\$0 to petitioner	Common Pleas Court	Same day	Up to 5 years

How it works here

A protection order is filed with the Common Pleas Clerk of Courts under R.C. 3113.31, with no fee. On a showing of immediate danger, the court can issue a same-day ex parte order, then hold a full hearing within 7 business days.

Three kinds of orders

There is one for a family or household member, one for menacing by stalking, and one for a victim of a sexually oriented offense. No criminal charge is needed for the last two. Use the court's protection-order forms.

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 Court is for parents who were never married.

Were the parents never married? Then the Juvenile Court decides custody, parenting time, and support. Judge Hany hears these cases.

Proving the father comes first

In Ohio, the mother of a child born outside marriage is the only legal custodian at first. That holds until a court says otherwise. So a father usually has to prove he is the father first. A custody filing needs the child's birth certificate, or proof that paternity is set.

Filing for custody as an unmarried parent

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Complaint for Parentage & Custody (Juv Form 2) https://www.ocpjcourt.com/pdf/complaintParentage-20241002.pdf	Ottawa Juvenile forms	Sets parentage, custody, parenting time
Parenting Proceeding Affidavit (Form 3) https://www.ocpjcourt.com/pdf/parentingProceedingAffidavit-20241002.pdf	Ottawa Juvenile forms	Required with a custody filing
Companionship Schedule (JC-3) https://www.ocpjcourt.com/pdf/jc3-20241002.pdf	Ottawa parenting-time order	The default parenting schedule
Caretaker Authorization Affidavit https://www.ocpjcourt.com/pdf/caretakerAuthAff-20241002.pdf	Ottawa Juvenile forms	Short-term care by a relative

THE DEPOSIT

A custody, visitation, or support case costs \$150 to file. There is no fee for a child support agency case. Mediation is \$25 a party. The Juvenile Court is at 315 Madison Street, (419) 734-6840.

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 the matching motion in the existing case. Support changes can also start through the county child support agency, which charges no filing fee.

Child-safety cases

These cases are heard in the Juvenile Court, which can name a guardian ad litem to speak for the child. To report a worry, call the hotline at 1-855-642-4453. For danger, call 911.

KINSHIP CAREGIVERS HAVE OPTIONS

A relative caring for a child has options. They can use a caretaker affidavit or a grandparent power of attorney. Both are on the court's forms page. They cover 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 Hany, who also leads the Juvenile Court. Here is the basic shape.

THE FEES DEPEND ON THE HOME STUDY

An adoption filed with a completed home study is \$100 a child. Filed without one, it is \$350 for the first child plus \$100 for each additional child. Adoptions are filed at 315 Madison Street, (419) 734-6830.

1

File the petition in Probate

File the Ohio Petition for Adoption of a Minor on the Supreme Court probate forms. Add the child's birth certificate, and a marriage certificate for a stepparent.

2

Address consent

The child's other legal parent 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, and the fee is lower if it is already done. A stepparent case can be simpler. The court sets what your case needs.

4

Attend the hearing

If the court finds the adoption is in the child's best interest, Judge Hany signs a final decree of adoption. A new birth record follows.

PART FOUR

How Gavvl Law can help in Ottawa 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.

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FEES AND PROCEDURES CHANGE

The court information in this guide was verified as of June 15, 2026 from official court sources. Court fees, forms, and procedures change. Always confirm current fees and requirements with the Ottawa 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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