

## PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

# Family Law in Portage County

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

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- 01** See why one broad “family court” handles most of Portage County family law — before you fill out a single form.

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  - 02** Tell dissolution, divorce, parentage cases, and adoption apart.

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  - 03** See the exact forms, checklists, and filing steps that trip people up in Ravenna — and the items you'll need to confirm with the court.

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  - 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 paperwork, and your next decision. Portage County is unusual: one broad Domestic Relations Court handles most family matters — so step one is knowing what goes there and what doesn't.

01

**Married, or never married?**

Divorce, dissolution, legal separation, annulment, and parentage, custody, parenting time, and support for unmarried parents are all the Domestic Relations Court (Judge Paula Giulitto).

02

**Need protection from violence?**

Domestic-violence and dating-violence protection orders are also the Domestic Relations Court — and there's never a filing fee.

03

**Adoption, or a children-services case?**

Adoption is the Probate Court, and abuse/neglect cases are the Juvenile Court — the two are combined into one court.

## READ THIS FIRST

This guide is information, not legal advice.

It explains how things generally work in Portage 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.

## PORTAGE COUNTY COURTS

# One family court handles most of it.

Portage County's Domestic Relations Court calls itself a “family court,” and it lives up to the name: it hears far more than most Ohio DR courts. Here's the map.

YOUR MATTER	COURT	WHERE / CONTACT
Divorce, dissolution, legal separation, annulment, protection orders	Domestic Relations Court Judge Giulitto	Clerk – DR (330) 297-3475
Parentage, custody, parenting time, and support for unmarried parents	Domestic Relations Court Judge Giulitto	Clerk – DR (330) 297-3475
Abuse, neglect, or dependency; juvenile delinquency	Juvenile Court combined Juv./Probate	confirm at the court
Stepparent and kinship adoption	Probate Court combined Juv./Probate	confirm at the court

#### WHAT MAKES PORTAGE DIFFERENT

Unmarried-parent custody is heard here, not in Juvenile Court.

In most Ohio counties, custody for parents who were never married goes to a juvenile docket. In Portage County the Domestic Relations Court hears it — it publishes “Minimum Requirements for Parentage/Custody Actions” and its own parentage forms. Only children-services and delinquency cases go to the Juvenile Court.

#### PLAN AHEAD ON THIS ONE

DR filing fees aren't reproduced here.

The Clerk sets separate deposits for divorce, dissolution, legal separation, and annulment (with vs. without children) and for post-decree motions, on its court-costs page. Confirm the current amount with the Clerk of Courts – Domestic Relations at (330) 297-3475 before you file. A fee waiver is available if you can't pay.

## PORTAGE COUNTY COURTS

# Child support, child safety, and filing notes.

A few things to know before you file, plus the numbers that matter most for children.

## MONEY FOR THE KIDS

**Child support — Portage County CSEA**  
 Child-support enforcement runs through Portage County Job & Family Services, (330) 297-3750. CSEA can establish paternity and support administratively and can review an existing order. The statewide calculator estimates the guideline number.

## IF A CHILD MAY BE UNSAFE

**Reporting abuse or neglect**  
 Portage County's child-abuse hotline is 330-296-CARE (330-296-2273), run by PCJFS Child & Adult Protective Services. If a child is in immediate danger, call 911.

## HOW PORTAGE COUNTY TAKES FILINGS

File with the Clerk's DR division; e-filing is available.  
 Domestic Relations documents are filed with the Clerk of Courts – Domestic Relations (203 W. Main St., Ravenna), open 8:00–4:00. Electronic (fax/email) filing is allowed for \$1 per transmission plus \$1 per page. Credit-card payments add a \$2 fee up to \$50, or 4% above \$50.

Divorce / dissolution	confirm with Clerk
Parenting class	free (Portage cases)
Protection order	no fee
Fee too high?	file an indigency affidavit

## PART ONE

# Domestic Relations: divorce, and protection orders.

If you are married and ending it — or you need protection from violence — the Domestic Relations Court is your court. This part walks through each path in the order most people meet them. (Parentage and custody for unmarried parents are also here, in Part Two.)

COURT	JUDGE	MAGISTRATES	FILE WITH
Domestic Relations	Paula Giulitto	three	Clerk – DR

**ONE THING THAT SURPRISES PEOPLE IN PORTAGE COUNTY**

Temporary support and custody usually require a hearing.

Under Local Rule 11(G), the Domestic Relations Court will not issue temporary custody, child-support, or spousal-support orders without an evidentiary hearing — unless it finds an order should issue in the interest of justice or the welfare of children. So don't expect an automatic, paper-only temporary order; plan for a short hearing. The court also offers mediation (staff mediator Rachel Pico) on parenting disputes.

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 WINDOW	SERVICE
Domestic Relations	confirm with Clerk	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.

Start with	“Minimum Requirements for Dissolutions”
Core filing	Petition for Dissolution (SCOO 17)
Agreement	Separation Agreement (SCOO 19)
Local affidavit	Financial Disclosure — Dissolution Only
Final step	Hearing where you both confirm the deal

**THE STATUTORY TIMELINE**  
 Hearing 30 to 90 days after filing.  
 Ohio law sets the dissolution hearing not less than 30 nor more than 90 days after filing. Both spouses attend and affirm the agreement; with children, both may attend the same parenting-class session.

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  
 Start with Portage County's "Minimum Requirements for Divorces" checklist. You prepare the Complaint for Divorce with the local Financial Disclosure affidavit and the statewide income, property, and (with children) parenting affidavits, then file with the Clerk's DR division.

**B** You were served with divorce papers  
 Read the first page for your answer deadline. You generally have 28 days from service to file an Answer (and a Counterclaim if you want your own requests). Missing it can let the case proceed without your input.

COURT	ANSWER DEADLINE	TEMP ORDERS	FILING FEE
Domestic Relations	28 days	hearing usually required	confirm with Clerk

**TWO WORDS PEOPLE MIX UP**  
 "Uncontested" divorce is not a dissolution.  
 An uncontested divorce is still a divorce one spouse files — it just isn't fought, and can proceed by agreement or default. A dissolution is a fully agreed joint filing with no one served. If you and your spouse agree on everything up front, a dissolution is usually faster and cheaper.

## DOMESTIC RELATIONS

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

Portage County publishes its own checklists and local affidavits, and uses the Ohio Supreme Court Uniform forms for the complaint, decree, and parenting plans.

FORM (TAP TO OPEN)	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="#">Minimum Requirements for Divorces (the county's checklist)</a> <a href="https://www.portagecounty-oh.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf3706/f/uploads/2.5_-_checklist_div_0.pdf">https://www.portagecounty-oh.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf3706/f/uploads/2.5_-_checklist_div_0.pdf</a>	Portage County DR Court	Start here — it lists exactly what a divorce filing must include
<p>△ Heads up: There's a separate "Minimum Requirements for Dissolutions" checklist for the agreed path.</p>		
<a href="#">Affidavit 1 — Income and Expenses</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Affidavit1.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Affidavit1.pdf</a>	Ohio Supreme Court (Uniform DR form)	Your finances; filed with the complaint
<a href="#">Affidavit 2 — Property and Debt</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Affidavit2.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Affidavit2.pdf</a>	Ohio Supreme Court (Uniform DR form)	Your property and debts; filed with the complaint
<a href="#">Affidavit of Indigency (fee waiver)</a> <a href="https://www.portagecounty-oh.gov/domestic-relations-court/files/affidavit-indigency">https://www.portagecounty-oh.gov/domestic-relations-court/files/affidavit-indigency</a>	Portage County DR Court	Ask the court to waive prepayment of the deposit if you can't pay
<a href="#">All Portage County DR forms</a> <a href="https://www.portagecounty-oh.gov/portage-county-domestic-relations-court/pages/domestic-relations-forms">https://www.portagecounty-oh.gov/portage-county-domestic-relations-court/pages/domestic-relations-forms</a>	Portage County DR Court	Local checklists, financial-disclosure affidavits, and motions
<p>△ Heads up: Use the local Financial Disclosure affidavit for Divorce/Annulment/Legal Separation in addition to the statewide affidavits.</p>		

## DOMESTIC RELATIONS

# What does a Portage 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
Temp orders	hearing usually required
Parenting class	free (Portage cases)
Filing fee	confirm with the Clerk

**1** Use the checklist, then file and pay  
Follow “Minimum Requirements for Divorces,” file the complaint with the local and statewide affidavits, and pay the deposit (confirm the amount), or file the Affidavit of Indigency.

**2** Serve your spouse  
Use the Clerk's Request for Service and Instructions — by certified mail, personal service, or publication if your spouse can't be found.

**3** Temporary orders, usually after a hearing  
File Affidavit 5 to request temporary support or custody. Because of Local Rule 11(G), the court generally sets an evidentiary hearing rather than ruling on the papers.

**4** Parenting class  
With minor children, complete “Children Are Forever” — free for Portage County cases. Mediation may be offered on parenting issues.

**5** Settle or go to hearing  
Disclosure and discovery follow; the court may refer parenting issues to mediation. Many cases resolve; if not, the court decides and the decree is journalized.

## 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 filed in the Domestic Relations Court through the Clerk's DR division.

## 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 personal reasons, or when they don't yet meet divorce residency. It mirrors a divorce in structure and can later lead to a divorce or dissolution.

## Annulment (R.C. 3105.31)

A court declares a marriage was never valid on a specific ground — such as bigamy, being underage without consent, fraud, or duress. A short marriage is not, by itself, a ground; annulments are usually attorney-drafted because the proof is technical.

### 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 in agreed cases. Both legal separation and annulment use Portage County's same local Financial Disclosure affidavit (the Divorce/Annulment/Legal Separation version).

## 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. Portage County's approach is distinctive: it usually wants a hearing first.

## Local Rule 11(G) — the defining feature

The Domestic Relations Court will not issue temporary custody, child-support, or spousal-support orders without an evidentiary hearing, unless it finds an order should issue in the interest of justice or the welfare of children. File Uniform DR Affidavit 5 to request temporary orders; the other party may file a counter-affidavit, and the court typically sets a hearing on contested custody or support.

## Temporary is not final.

A temporary order holds things steady while the case is pending. The final decree controls long-term custody and support.

## WHEN A CHILD IS IN DANGER

### A protection order is the fastest path.

If the danger involves family or household violence, a Domestic Violence Civil Protection Order can provide immediate, often same-day ex parte relief — the quickest emergency route when safety is at issue (next pages).

## Child abuse by a caregiver?

Contact PCJFS Child & Adult Protective Services at 330-296-CARE (2273) or call 911; emergency removal runs through the Juvenile Court.

## DOMESTIC RELATIONS

# Objections and appeals: review, not a redo.

Because magistrates decide many matters in Portage County, knowing how to ask a judge to review a decision — and the short deadlines for doing it — matters.

## FIRST LEVEL

## Objecting to a magistrate's decision

The Domestic Relations Court has three magistrates who hear many matters. You generally have 14 days to file written objections under Civ.R. 53; if you object to the facts, you must order a transcript. The judge then reviews the magistrate's decision — 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); Portage County is in the Eleventh District. 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.

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 a family or household member to stay away, leave a shared home, and stop contact, and can set temporary custody and support terms. Portage County also issues dating-violence orders. There is never a filing fee.

### How it works

File the petition using Portage County's Domestic Violence CPO Packet (or the Dating Violence CPO Packet) with the Clerk's DR division. The court can issue a temporary ex parte order the same day if you are in danger; the sheriff serves the respondent; and a full hearing follows, generally within about 7 to 10 days, with a final order up to five years.

### A protection order stands on its own.

It is separate from any divorce or custody case, though it can include temporary parenting and support terms. Violating it is a crime, and the court also publishes motions to modify, terminate, or enforce a CPO by contempt.

### WHICH PACKET?

#### DV vs. dating violence.

Use the Domestic Violence packet for a family or household member (spouse, ex, co-parent, relative, or someone you live or lived with). Use the Dating Violence packet for a current or recent dating partner.

Filing fee	none, ever
Ex parte order	often the same day
Full hearing	about 7–10 days
Final order	up to 5 years

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

<https://www.portagecounty-oh.gov/portage-county-clerk-courts/files/domestic-violence-civil-protection-order-packet>

Portage County Clerk – DR

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

[Dating Violence Civil Protection Order Packet](#)

<https://www.portagecounty-oh.gov/portage-county-clerk-courts/files/dating-violence-civil-protection-order-packet>

Portage County Clerk – DR

Protection from a current or recent dating partner

⚠ Heads up: No filing fee for the petitioner. There's a separate Dating Violence CPO Packet for a dating partner.

NOT SURE WHICH PATH IS YOURS?

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

Dissolution, divorce, a parentage 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.

## 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 — the affidavits ask for a lot.
- 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 move money or cancel insurance once a case is filed.

## PART TWO

# Never married? Still the Domestic Relations Court.

Here's the Portage County twist: parentage, custody, parenting time, and support for parents who were never married are decided by the same Domestic Relations Court — not a juvenile docket. Only children-services cases go to the Juvenile Court.

COURT	JUDGE	START WITH	FILING FEE
Domestic Relations	Paula Giulitto	Parentage checklist	confirm with Clerk

**WHY THIS MATTERS**

One court, one set of forms.

Because parentage and custody live in the DR Court here, you use the court's "Minimum Requirements for Parentage/Custody Actions" checklist and its "Affidavit of Financial Disclosure – Parentage" — the same court, the same judge, and the same magistrates that handle divorces. Child support can also be started administratively through CSEA.

## PARENTAGE &amp; CUSTODY

# Unmarried parents: parentage first, then custody.

This is a common Domestic Relations case in Portage County. It happens in two steps, and support can run through the court and the CSEA.

## Step one: establish parentage

Parentage is the legal parent-child link (R.C. 3111). It can be set by a signed Acknowledgment of Paternity, by a CSEA administrative order with genetic testing, or by a judicial Complaint for Parentage. Establishing parentage opens support — it does not by itself decide custody.

## Step two: ask for custody

The court then allocates parental rights as sole custody (one residential parent and legal custodian) or shared parenting (both parents under a plan), sets parenting time, and orders support. Ohio has no “primary” or “joint” custody.

### USE THE COUNTY'S OWN MATERIALS

Start with the Parentage/Custody checklist.

Portage County publishes “Minimum Requirements for Parentage/Custody Actions,” an “Affidavit of Financial Disclosure – Parentage,” and dedicated allocation and parenting-time form sets — all on the DR Court forms page. “Children Are Forever” is required in an initial custody or parenting-time case.

## PARENTAGE &amp; CUSTODY

# Forms for an unmarried-parent case.

Portage County uses its own checklist and a parentage financial-disclosure affidavit, with the statewide parentage complaint.

FORM (TAP TO OPEN)	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="#">Minimum Requirements for Parentage/Custody Actions</a> <a href="https://www.portagecounty-oh.gov/sites/gj/files/vyhlf3706/f/uploads/2.75_-_checklist_parent_0.pdf">https://www.portagecounty-oh.gov/sites/gj/files/vyhlf3706/f/uploads/2.75_-_checklist_parent_0.pdf</a>	Portage County DR Court	Start here — the county's checklist for a parentage/custody filing
<a href="#">Complaint for Parentage, Allocation &amp; Parenting Time (SCOO 23)</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form23.pdf">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/DRForms/Form23.pdf</a>	Ohio Supreme Court (Uniform form)	Establishes parentage and asks the court to allocate custody and time
<a href="#">Child Support Computation Worksheet</a> <a href="https://ohiochildsupportcalculator.ohio.gov/home.html">https://ohiochildsupportcalculator.ohio.gov/home.html</a>	Ohio child-support calculator	Builds the guideline support number
<a href="#">All Portage County DR forms</a> <a href="https://www.portagecounty-oh.gov/portage-county-domestic-relations-court/pages/domestic-relations-forms">https://www.portagecounty-oh.gov/portage-county-domestic-relations-court/pages/domestic-relations-forms</a>	Portage County DR Court	The parentage affidavit and allocation / parenting-time form sets

△ Heads up: Administrative paternity through CSEA generally carries no court filing fee; confirm the DR deposit with the Clerk, (330) 297-3475.

## PARENTAGE &amp; CUSTODY

# 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. Both are decided in the Domestic Relations Court.

## The court's standard schedules

The Domestic Relations Court applies standard in-state and out-of-state parenting-time schedules, published in its local rules, as the starting point for a parent's time. Confirm the specific holiday and long-distance terms in the current schedules with the court.

## One court for all of it.

Whether parents are married, divorcing, or never married, parenting time is decided in the Domestic Relations Court here.

## Grandparent and relative companionship

Non-parents do not have automatic rights. A grandparent or relative may seek companionship in qualifying situations — for example, when the parents are unmarried or a parent has died (R.C. 3109.11, 3109.12). The court weighs the child's best interest and a fit parent's wishes.

## IF YOU MOVE

### File a relocation notice.

A residential parent who intends to move files a Notice of Intent to Relocate; the court may set a hearing to decide whether parenting time should change.

## PARENTAGE &amp; CUSTODY

# When a grandparent or relative is raising the child.

A relative or other suitable adult can ask for legal custody of a child when neither parent can appropriately care for them. It gives day-to-day custody while parents keep certain rights. It is not adoption.

**A HIGHER BAR THAN PARENT-VS-PARENT****The 'unsuitability' standard.**

When a non-parent seeks custody against a parent, best interest alone is not enough. The non-parent must generally show the parents are unsuitable — abandonment, an agreement to give up custody, or that parental custody would harm the child — before the court awards legal custody to the non-parent.

**Custody is not adoption.**

Legal custody leaves parents with residual rights (including visitation and consent to adoption) and can be changed later. Adoption permanently ends parental rights and goes through the Probate Court.

**Where it's filed**

A non-parent custody request tied to an allocation of parental rights is heard in the Domestic Relations Court; a child already in the dependency system is handled in the Juvenile Court with PCJFS. Confirm the right docket for a standalone non-parent petition with the court.

**A NOTE ON THE GAL****A guardian for the child.**

A Guardian ad Litem is commonly appointed in a contested non-parent custody case to represent the child's best interest; the court publishes a sample GAL report on its forms page.

## PARENTAGE &amp; CUSTODY

# Child support, and changing an order.

Ohio builds child support from both parents' incomes, and an order can be changed when life changes. Most modifications stay in the Domestic Relations Court that made the original order.

## How support is built

Ohio uses an income-shares model: both parents' incomes, work-related child care, health-insurance cost, and the number of children go into a statewide worksheet. About 90 or more overnights a year can adjust the number. Support runs through the DR Court and the CSEA.

## Changing an order

Custody changes need a real change in circumstances plus the child's best interest (R.C. 3109.04); parenting-time changes use the best-interest standard; support changes on a substantial change (often the roughly 10% test). Local Rule 11(G) applies to any interim order during a post-decree dispute.

## RUN YOUR OWN NUMBERS FIRST

### Estimate before you negotiate.

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)

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

## Two ways to change support.

You can request a CSEA administrative review, or file a modification motion in the DR case. A Compliance Officer (Jessica Schilling) supports the court on compliance matters.

## JUVENILE

# When Children Services is involved.

Here is the one piece that leaves the Domestic Relations Court: when a child may be abused, neglected, or dependent, PCJFS Child & Adult Protective Services investigates and, if needed, files a case in the Juvenile Court. The process protects the child while working toward a safe, permanent home.

## The stages, in plain order

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

## You may have a lawyer; the child has a GAL.

Parents have the right to counsel, appointed if you can't afford one, and a Guardian ad Litem represents the child. Agency foster-care adoption is separate from the Probate stepparent or kinship process.

## REPORT FIRST IF A CHILD IS AT RISK

### Who to call.

PCJFS child-abuse hotline: 330-296-CARE (330-296-2273). 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 free Bar Association clinic and the resources on the disclosures page are there for a reason.

## PART THREE

# Probate: stepparent and kinship adoption.

Adoption permanently makes an adult the legal parent of a child. In Portage County it is the Probate Court — part of the combined Juvenile/Probate Court, a different court from the Domestic Relations Court that handles divorces.

COURT	PART OF	COURT COSTS	CONSENT
Probate Court	Juvenile/Probate	confirm	R.C. 3107.06–.07

**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 a stepparent adoption, the child becomes the stepparent's legal child. A home study is required for minor adoptions (often streamlined for stepparent cases), and an amended birth certificate issues at the end.

## PROBATE

# What a Portage County adoption involves.

The Probate Court uses the Ohio standardized adoption forms. The most common family adoptions are stepparent and kinship, and the central question is usually consent.

**THE USUAL STICKING POINT**

Consent is the heart of most cases.

Many stepparent adoptions turn on whether the other parent's consent is required. The failure-to-support-or-communicate exception is fact-specific — this is where early legal advice matters most.

**CONFIRM BEFORE YOU FILE**

The Probate forms and fee aren't reproduced here.

Adoption uses the Ohio standardized probate forms. Confirm the combined Juvenile/Probate Court's local adoption forms, any checklist, and the current filing fee at the court before filing.

- 1** **File the petition**  
File a petition for adoption in the Probate Court (part of the combined Juvenile/Probate Court) with the child's birth certificate, any consents, and required affidavits.
- 2** **Consent or its exceptions**  
The other legal parent generally must consent (R.C. 3107.06). Consent can be excused (R.C. 3107.07) where, for example, a parent failed without justifiable cause to support or communicate with the child for at least one year.
- 3** **Assessment / home study**  
A home study or pre-finalization assessment is required for minor adoptions, and is often streamlined for stepparent adoptions.
- 4** **Hearing**  
The court holds a hearing on consent and the child's best interest, including any contested-consent question.
- 5** **Final decree and amended birth record**  
The court issues the final decree of adoption, and an amended birth certificate issues for the child.

FORM (TAP TO OPEN)	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
<a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/probate/5">Ohio standardized probate adoption forms</a> <a href="https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/probate/5">https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/probate/5</a>	Ohio Supreme Court (probate forms)	The adoption petition, consent, and decree forms Ohio courts use
<p>△ Heads up: Confirm the Portage Probate Court's local adoption forms and filing fee at its hub before filing.</p>		
<a href="https://www.portagecounty-oh.gov/juvenileprobate-court">Portage Juvenile / Probate Court (hub)</a> <a href="https://www.portagecounty-oh.gov/juvenileprobate-court">https://www.portagecounty-oh.gov/juvenileprobate-court</a>	Portage County	The combined court's page — confirm contacts, forms, and fees

#### 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.

## Parentage & custody

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](mailto: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 Portage County, but it can't account for your situation. Reading or contacting Gavvl Law does not create an attorney-client relationship — only a signed engagement agreement does. For advice about your 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 and procedures change, and some Portage County items (the DR fee amounts, the Juvenile/Probate details) aren't reproduced here. Verified as of June 15, 2026 from official court sources; always confirm current fees with the relevant court before filing.

## Jurisdiction and responsibility.

Gavvl Law attorneys are licensed to practice law in Ohio. This guide describes Ohio law and Portage County procedure only. Advertising material, Gavvl Law LLC. Attorney responsible for this content: Stephanie Green, Esq., Managing Partner. Privacy policy: [gavvl.com/privacy-policy](https://gavvl.com/privacy-policy)

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READY WHEN YOU ARE .

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

We'll help you find the right court and the level of help that fits.

(844) 694-2885

[support@gavvl.com](mailto:support@gavvl.com)

[gavvl.com/find-my-service](https://gavvl.com/find-my-service)

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