

PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

Family Law in Sandusky County

A plain-English map for divorce, dissolution, custody, support, and adoption in Fremont and across Sandusky 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 Sandusky County handles family law across the Common Pleas Court.

 - 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 Sandusky 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 Sandusky 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.

DIVORCE COSTS MORE THAN DISSOLUTION

In Sandusky County, a dissolution deposit is \$350 and a divorce deposit is \$400, so the fully agreed path is also the cheaper one to file. A divorce by publication is \$650.

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 Sandusky County they are parts of the Common Pleas Court at 100 N. Park Avenue in Fremont. 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

Judges Jeremiah S. Ray & Jon M. Ickes.

PARENTS NEVER MARRIED

Juvenile Court

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

WHO HEARS IT

Judge Brad Smith.

ADOPTION

Probate Court

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

WHO HEARS IT

Judge Smith, same as Juvenile.

One Common Pleas Court, three roles

Divorce and dissolution are heard in the Common Pleas Court before Judges Ray and Ickes. Unmarried-parent custody and adoption both run through the combined Juvenile and Probate Court under Judge Smith. All sit at 100 N. Park Avenue in Fremont. 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?

DISSOLUTION	DIVORCE	WHERE YOU FILE	RESIDENCY
\$350	\$400	Common Pleas Clerk	6 months in Ohio

QUICK PATHFINDER

Do you agree on everything?

If yes, dissolution may fit, and it costs less to file here. 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 DEPOSITS

A dissolution costs \$350 to file, a divorce \$400, and a divorce by publication, used when you cannot find your spouse, is \$650. A \$5 self-help packet is available. One spouse must have lived in Ohio six months.

DISSOLUTION

The dissolution packet, step by step.

Dissolution uses the Ohio Supreme Court forms plus a few local ones. 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 sign and file the joint petition with the Separation Agreement. The hearing is 30 to 90 days out, and both spouses must appear and affirm the agreement is voluntary and that they still want the dissolution.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Petition + Waiver of Service https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Sandusky dissolution packet	Both spouses sign; opens the joint case
Separation Agreement https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Your signed terms; notarize this first
Affidavits 1 & 2 https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Income/expenses and property/debt
Parenting plan + worksheet https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; the plan and support math
Affidavits 3 & 4 + IV-D https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; parenting, insurance, support

GOOD TO KNOW**The COPE class**

The Clerk provides information on a parent-education class called COPE for cases with children. Whether it is required, the deadline, the cost, and the format are not spelled out, so confirm the current details with the Clerk.

IF YOU STOP AGREEING

A dissolution only works if both spouses agree all the way through the hearing. If you cannot agree at the hearing, either spouse can convert the case or proceed by divorce instead.

DIVORCE

Filing a divorce when you do not agree.

Divorce is filed with the Common Pleas Clerk of Courts. Sandusky uses the Ohio Supreme Court forms, and a restraining order takes effect the moment you file.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Complaint for Divorce https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Starts the lawsuit; with or without children
Affidavit 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 2 (Property & Debt) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Lists what you own and owe
Parenting Proceeding Affidavit https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; the UCCJEA affidavit
Temporary Orders motion (Form J) https://sccommonpleas.com/domestic-relations/forms/	Sandusky DR forms	File if you want orders during the case

A restraining order at filing

When you file a divorce, a Mutual Restraining Order takes effect right away. No separate motion is needed. It stops both spouses from things like hiding assets, changing insurance, or harassing each other while the case runs.

WANT ORDERS DURING THE CASE?

You can ask for temporary support or a parenting schedule by filing the Form J motion and affidavit. See the next page for how Sandusky handles the timing.

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 the Motion and Affidavit for Temporary Orders without an oral hearing, called Form J, with your complaint or after. It can cover parenting time, child support, spousal support, and who pays which bills.

The 14-day window

The other party has 14 days from service to file a responsive affidavit. After that, the judge or magistrate issues a temporary order based on the filings. Either party can request an evidentiary hearing in writing.

EMERGENCIES

If your situation involves a child's safety or domestic violence, a protection order may be the faster tool than waiting on temporary orders. Unmarried-parent emergencies are handled in the Juvenile Court. If anyone is in danger right now, call 911.

CHILDREN

Custody, parenting time, and child support.

Ohio uses specific words for custody. Sandusky County uses a standard parenting-time order 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 standard schedule

When parents cannot agree, the court applies its Standard Order for Parenting Time as the default. Parents are free to agree on their own plan instead, which the court will usually approve if it fits the children.

CHILD SUPPORT RUNS THROUGH THE CSEA

The Sandusky County child support agency handles support. Support is set under Ohio's guidelines, collected by income withholding, and paid through the state. Ask the court for the agency's current contact.

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 Sandusky County order.

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

POST-JUDGMENT MOTION**\$300**

To modify or enforce an order after the decree

CROSS-CLAIM OR COUNTERCLAIM**\$150**

The other party's own claim in a case

CONSENT ENTRY**\$75**

When both sides agree to the change

Modifying and enforcing

To change custody or support, or to enforce an order, you file a post-judgment motion for \$300. Support changes can also start through the county child support agency.

PAY OLD COSTS FIRST

Sandusky requires any past-due court costs to be paid in full before you can start a new proceeding. Clear an old balance before you file your next motion so it is not held up.

HELP ALONG THE WAY

Mediation, GALs, and parenting time.

Sandusky 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 on their own. The Juvenile Court screens unmarried-parent custody cases to mediation first. It is never used for a protection order.

Guardians ad litem

The court can appoint a guardian ad litem in a contested case. Each party deposits \$400, and the court also orders a cash bond of at least \$1,500 toward the guardian's fees.

Standard parenting time

The court's Standard Order for Parenting Time gives a default schedule when parents do not agree on their own plan. It covers the regular schedule, holidays, and summers.

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 Sandusky 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	WHERE	PETITION	FINAL ORDER
\$0 to petitioner	Common Pleas Court	Notarized	Up to 5 years

How it works here
 A protection order is filed in the Common Pleas Court under R.C. 3113.31, with no fee. The petition must be notarized. The court arranges an ex parte hearing as soon as it reasonably can, then holds a full hearing as the law requires.

Forms and minors
 If you are filing on your own, the Clerk provides the forms. A protection order for or against a minor is handled in the Juvenile Court under Judge Smith. Confirm the right court for a stalking petition.

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 divorce restraining order is not the same as a protection order.

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 Smith.

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 and Custody https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Uniform Form 23	Sets parentage, custody, parenting time
Parenting Proceeding Affidavit https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Required with a custody filing
Child support worksheet https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Required when support is at issue
Application for Child Support https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Juvenile Court or CSEA	Sets up the support case with the agency

A PER-CHILD DEPOSIT

A juvenile custody or visitation complaint costs \$178 per child, and reactivating a case is \$116 per child. The Juvenile Court is at 100 N. Park Avenue, (419) 334-6200. A Grandparent Power of Attorney has no filing charge.

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 \$116 per child. Support changes can also start through the county child support agency.

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 the Ohio child-abuse hotline at 1-855-642-4453. For immediate danger, call 911.

KINSHIP CAREGIVERS HAVE OPTIONS

A relative caring for a child can use a Grandparent Power of Attorney or a Caretaker Authorization Affidavit, which carry no filing charge, for short-term needs like school and medical care, 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 Smith, who also leads the Juvenile Court. Here is the basic shape.

THE DEPOSITS, AND A KEY RULE

A private adoption deposit is \$350 per child, and an adoption of a child in agency custody is \$150 per child. Only an attorney or a licensed agency may arrange an adoption, and adoption court costs are never waived.

1

File the petition in Probate

File the Ohio Petition for Adoption of a Minor at 100 N. Park Avenue. Add the child's birth certificate. For a stepparent, add the marriage certificate too.

2

Address consent

The other parent usually must consent. A court can rule consent is not required in some cases. A child 12 or older also consents. The Probate Court has exclusive say over adoptions.

3

Complete the home study

Ohio law usually asks for a home study. In an independent adoption, the court must approve the placement first, and the child lives in the home at least six months before the decree.

4

Attend the hearing

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

PART FOUR

How Gavvl Law can help in Sandusky 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 15, 2026 from official court sources. Court fees, forms, and procedures change. Always confirm current fees and requirements with the Sandusky 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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