

PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

Family Law in Seneca County

A plain-English map for divorce, dissolution, custody, support, and adoption in Tiffin and across Seneca 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 Seneca 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 Seneca 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 Seneca County. It cannot cover the facts of your case. Reading it, downloading it, or contacting Gavvl Law does not make you a client. Only a signed engagement agreement does that. For advice about your own case, talk with a licensed Ohio attorney.

A REQUIRED PARENTING CLASS

In any Seneca County case about custody, including divorce and dissolution, parents must take the Children in the Middle class within six weeks of filing. School-age children attend a workshop too.

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 Seneca County they are parts of the Common Pleas Court at the Justice Center in Tiffin. 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 Steve C. Shuff & Damon D. Alt.

PARENTS NEVER MARRIED

Juvenile Court

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

WHO HEARS IT

Judge Jay A. Meyer.

ADOPTION

Probate Court

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

WHO HEARS IT

Judge Meyer, same as Juvenile.

One Justice Center, three courts

Divorce and dissolution are heard in the Common Pleas Court before Judges Shuff and Alt. Unmarried-parent custody and adoption both run through the combined Juvenile and Probate Court under Judge Meyer. All sit at 103 E. Market Street in Tiffin. File with the right one for your case.

PART ONE

Divorce and dissolution run through the Common Pleas Court.

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

DIVORCE OR DISSOLUTION	POST-DECREE MOTION	WHERE YOU FILE	RESIDENCY
\$450	\$350	Common Pleas Clerk	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, legal separation, or dissolution costs \$450 to file, with or without children. There is no higher fee for cases with children, though those cases need extra forms. 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.

WITH CHILDREN, FINISH THE CLASS FIRST

A dissolution is fully agreed, and the hearing is 30 to 90 days out, where both spouses must appear. If you have minor children, both parents must finish the Children in the Middle class before that final hearing.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Petition for Dissolution (Form 17) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Both spouses sign; opens the joint case
Separation Agreement (Form 19) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Your signed terms; notarize this first
Affidavits of income & property https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Each spouse's finances
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
Title IV-D application https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Seneca DR forms	With children; sets up support
Decree of Dissolution (Form 18) https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	The judgment the court signs

REQUIRED**Children in the Middle**

In a divorce or dissolution with children, both parents take this class, and school-age children attend their own workshop. Finish within six weeks of filing. No final hearing is held until the certificates are filed.

MEDIATION

The court offers mediation to help settle parenting issues, at \$100 per party. It is never used for a domestic violence case or to decide a protection order.

DIVORCE

Filing a divorce when you do not agree.

Divorce is filed with the Common Pleas Clerk of Courts. Seneca uses the Ohio Supreme Court forms, and you can fax later papers to the Clerk.

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 of Income & Expenses https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Your financial picture
Affidavit of Property 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
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

Want orders during the case?

You can ask for temporary support or a parenting schedule while the divorce is pending. You file Affidavit 5, the motion and affidavit for temporary orders. See the next page for how Seneca handles these.

DON'T FORGET THE CLASS

A divorce with children also requires the Children in the Middle class within six weeks of filing. The court will not hold the final hearing until the certificates are filed.

TEMPORARY ORDERS

Getting orders while the case runs.

A divorce can take months. Temporary orders set the rules in the meantime — things like temporary support or a parenting schedule.

How you ask

You file Affidavit 5, a motion and affidavit for temporary orders, usually decided without an oral hearing. For temporary child support, you attach a worksheet. You can request orders with your divorce filing.

Emergency custody is narrow

The court will not name a temporary residential parent without notice unless affidavits show an immediate or imminent risk to the child's safety. Any such emergency motion must be personally served on the other parent.

ASKING TO CHANGE AN ORDER, AND EMERGENCIES

If the court grants a temporary order without a hearing, you can ask in writing for an oral hearing to change it. The county does not publish a fixed response deadline, so confirm the current timing with the Clerk. If anyone is in danger right now, call 911.

CHILDREN

Custody, the class, and child support.

Ohio uses specific words for custody. Seneca County requires a parenting class and uses a detailed standard schedule.

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 a standard schedule that changes with the child's age and how far apart the parents live: local within 45 miles, regional up to 200 miles, and long distance beyond that.

CHILD SUPPORT RUNS THROUGH THE CSEA

The Seneca County child support agency handles support. Reach it at (419) 447-5011. Support is set under Ohio's guidelines, collected by income withholding, and paid through the state.

THE REST OF A DIVORCE

Spousal support, property, and other paths.

Beyond custody and child support, a divorce sorts out spousal support and divides what you own and owe.

Spousal support

The court can order one spouse to support the other for a set time. Ohio weighs income, the length of the marriage, health, and other factors. There is no fixed formula.

Property and debt

Ohio divides marital property and debt fairly. Fair does not always mean a 50-50 split. Property you brought into the marriage may count as separate.

Legal separation and annulment

Both are filed in the Common Pleas Court. Legal separation costs the same \$450 and 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 Seneca County order.

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

POST-DECREE MOTION**\$350**

To modify or enforce an order after the decree

COUNTERCLAIM**\$250**

The other party's own claim in a divorce

CONSENT JUDGMENT ENTRY**\$50**

When both sides agree to the change

Modifying and enforcing

To change custody or support, or to enforce an order, you file a post-decree motion for \$350. Support changes can also start through the county agency at (419) 447-5011.

THE CLASS CAN COME BACK

The court can order the Children in the Middle class again in a post-decree parenting matter. If it does, finish it and file your certificate so the case is not delayed.

HELP ALONG THE WAY

Mediation, GALs, and the class.

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

Mediation

The court offers mediation, at \$100 per party, to help parents reach an agreement on their own. It is never used for a domestic violence case or to decide a protection order.

Guardians ad litem

The court can appoint a guardian ad litem to look into the children's needs in a contested case. A deposit is required to cover the guardian's fees.

Children in the Middle

This class is required for parents in any custody case, including divorce and dissolution. School-age children attend their own workshop. Finish within six weeks of filing.

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 Seneca 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. Ohio has one for domestic violence and one for stalking. Your safety drives the timeline.

FILING FEE	FILE BY	EX PARTE ORDER	FINAL ORDER
\$0 to petitioner	2:30 p.m.	Same day	Up to 5 years

How it works here

A protection order is filed in the Common Pleas Court under R.C. 3113.31. There is no fee. File by 2:30 p.m. for a same-day ex parte hearing. A full hearing follows, and a final order can last up to five years.

Free help filing

The Seneca County Victim's Assistance Program helps with the petition at (419) 448-5070, and the First Step shelter offers a victim advocate at (419) 435-7300.

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.

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 Meyer.

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/domestic-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/domestic-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/domestic-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/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Juvenile Court or CSEA	Sets up the support case with the agency

COSTS AND FILING

A new juvenile custody or paternity case costs \$178 per child, and a later motion in an existing case is \$163 per child. The Juvenile Court is at 103 E. Market Street, (419) 447-4912, and accepts e-filing.

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, which costs \$163 per child. Support changes can also start through the county agency at (419) 447-5011.

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 about a child's safety, contact county children services. For immediate danger, call 911.

A NOTE ON GUARDIAN AND STUDY DEPOSITS

In a contested juvenile case, the court may order a guardian ad litem or a home investigation, each with its own deposit. Ask the Juvenile Court what your case is likely to need so you can plan for the cost.

PART THREE

Adoption is handled by the Probate Court.

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

THE DEPOSITS INCLUDE A HOME STUDY

A stepparent adoption deposit is \$701, and a private adoption is \$801. Both include the home study. Confirm your type and current fee with Probate at (419) 447-3121.

1

File the petition in Probate

File the Ohio Petition for Adoption of a Minor (Form 18.0) at 103 E. Market Street. Add the child's birth certificate. For a stepparent, add the marriage certificate too.

2

Address consent

The other parent usually must consent (Form 18.3). A court can rule consent is not required in some cases, such as a year of no contact or support. A child 12 or older also consents.

3

Complete the home study

The deposit includes a home study, where an assessor visits and interviews the family. A stepparent case can be simpler. Ask the Probate Court what your type needs.

4

Attend the hearing

If the court says yes, Judge Meyer signs a final decree of adoption. A new birth record can follow.

PART FOUR

How Gavvl Law can help in Seneca 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 Seneca 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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