

PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

Family Law in Stark County

A plain-English map for divorce, dissolution, custody, support, and adoption in Canton and across Stark County: how the Family Court is set up, what to file, what it costs, and when to get help.

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- 01** See how Stark County runs one Family Court for divorce and juvenile cases.

 - 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 Stark County.

01

Which division handles this?

Stark County has one Family Court with two divisions. The Domestic Relations Division hears divorce and dissolution. The Juvenile Division handles custody for unmarried parents. Adoption is a separate Probate Court.

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 Stark 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 FREE HELP DESK ON MONDAYS

The Stark County Family Court runs a Help Desk on Monday mornings, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., at (330) 451-7415. Staff can explain court steps, though they cannot give you legal advice.

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 handles your case?

One family can touch more than one court. Stark County combines divorce and juvenile cases in one Family Court, with adoption in a separate court. Start with the relationship, and with what you need a judge to decide.

MARRIED OR FORMERLY MARRIED

Domestic Relations Division

Divorce, dissolution, legal separation, annulment, spousal support, and dividing property and debt.

WHO HEARS IT

Judge Michelle L. Cordova.

PARENTS NEVER MARRIED

Juvenile Division

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

WHO HEARS IT

Judge Rosemarie A. Hall.

ADOPTION

Probate Court

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

WHERE

The separate Stark County Probate Court.

One Family Court, three judges

The Stark County Family Court runs the Domestic Relations and Juvenile Divisions from 110 Central Plaza South, Suite 670, in Canton, under Judges Hall, Cordova, and Kreitzer, with six magistrates. Adoption is a separate Probate Court. File with the right court for your case.

PART ONE

The Domestic Relations Division ends marriages.

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

DIVORCE	DISSOLUTION	LEGAL SEPARATION	RESIDENCY
\$391	\$371	\$359	6 months in Ohio

QUICK PATHFINDER

Do you agree on everything?

If yes, dissolution may fit. If no, divorce is the safer or required path. Agreement means more than wanting the case over. It means signed terms on property, debt, support, and parenting.

Dissolution is built on agreement.

Both spouses file together. They ask the court to approve a signed Separation Agreement. The hearing is set about six weeks out, 30 to 90 days after filing. 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 divorce or annulment costs \$391, a dissolution \$371, and a legal separation \$359. With children, you also file a custody (UCCJEA) affidavit and a child support worksheet. One spouse must have lived in Ohio six months.

DISSOLUTION

The dissolution packet, step by step.

Dissolution uses the Ohio Supreme Court forms. Sign the Separation Agreement in front of a notary first. Then build the rest of the packet around it.

BOTH OF YOU MUST SHOW UP

A dissolution is fully agreed. You file together, and the hearing is set about six weeks out, 30 to 90 days after filing. Both spouses must appear and affirm the agreement. The Clerk will not accept the filing without signed, sworn financial statements.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
Petition for Dissolution 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 https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Your signed terms; notarize this first
Financial Affidavit https://www.starkcountyohio.gov/government/legal__judicial/family_court/resources/court_filing_forms.php	Stark Family Court	Sworn; one per party or one signed by both
UCCJEA custody affidavit https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Required when there are children
Child support worksheet + IV-D https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; support math and setup
Decree of Dissolution https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	The judgment the court signs

WITH CHILDREN**The parent class**

If you have minor children, both parents take a court-approved parent-education class, offered online. Skipping it will not delay your decree, but it can bring other consequences, so plan to finish it.

MEDIATION

The court can refer a parenting dispute to mediation. You attend an orientation, then a first session within 20 days, and it usually wraps within 60 days. It is never used to decide a protection order.

DIVORCE

Filing a divorce when you do not agree.

Divorce is filed through the Clerk of Courts. Stark uses the Ohio Supreme Court forms plus the court's Financial Affidavit. The court will not accept the filing without sworn financial statements.

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
Financial Affidavit https://www.starkcountyohio.gov/government/legal_judicial/family_court/resources/court_filing_forms.php	Stark Family Court	Sworn; required at filing
UCCJEA custody affidavit https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; the custody jurisdiction form
IV-D application https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Stark Family Court	With children; sets up support
Child support worksheet https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; the support math

Timing and a witness

A divorce is uncontested if no answer is filed within 28 days. No divorce is heard until at least 42 days after service. In an uncontested case, you bring one witness who knows the facts of the marriage.

A RESTRAINING ORDER AT FILING

When a divorce or legal separation is filed, the Clerk issues the court's standard mutual restraining order. It keeps both spouses from hiding assets, running up debt, or moving the children without consent or court permission.

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 they work here

You ask for temporary orders by motion, scheduled through the assignment commissioner. A magistrate can hear and rule on them. A temporary hearing is generally set within about 1 to 21 days of the request.

Confirm the response timing

Stark County does not publish a fixed deadline for the other party to file a counter-affidavit. Confirm the current timing with the Clerk at (330) 451-7801 so you know what to expect.

THE RESTRAINING ORDER, AND EMERGENCIES

Remember that the standard mutual restraining order is already in place from the day you file. For temporary child support, bring a completed worksheet to the hearing. For protection from violence, a protection order has no fee and is the faster tool. If anyone is in danger right now, call 911.

CHILDREN

Custody, parenting time, and child support.

Ohio uses specific words for custody. Stark County also has a standard schedule that leans toward shared, equal time where it fits.

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, but Stark's default schedule leans toward equal time where it fits the children.

The standard schedule

When parents cannot agree, the court has a developmental schedule. For ages 2 to 13 it uses an equal 2-2-5-5 rotation, with about three weeks each in the summer. Parents can agree to something else instead.

CHILD SUPPORT

Child support is handled by the county child support agency. Support is set under Ohio's guidelines, collected by income withholding, and paid through the state, not directly between parents.

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

Legal separation costs \$359 and sets terms without ending the marriage. Annulment is filed with a divorce-tier deposit and has narrow grounds.

A note on moving with the children

Stark's parenting schedule sets relocation notice rules: 30 days for a move within the county, 60 days elsewhere in Ohio, and 90 days out of state. The other parent then has 14 days to respond. Plan a move well ahead and follow these notice rules.

AFTER THE DECREE

Changing or enforcing a Stark County order.

Life changes after a case ends. To bring a new issue back, you reopen the case that issued your decree.

REOPEN A CLOSED CASE**\$273**

When a hearing is requested after the case closed

COUNTERCLAIM OR CROSS-CLAIM**\$251**

The other party's own claim in a case

CUSTODY REGISTER PETITION**\$313**

To register and enforce an out-of-state custody order

Modifying and enforcing

To change custody or support, or to enforce an order, you file a motion in your case, scheduled through the assignment commissioner. Support changes can also start through the county child support agency.

THE MONDAY HELP DESK

If you are not sure how to file, the Family Court Help Desk runs Mondays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at (330) 451-7415. Staff explain the process but cannot give legal advice on your case.

HELP ALONG THE WAY

Mediation, GALs, and the Help Desk.

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

Mediation

The court can refer a parenting dispute to mediation. It starts with an orientation, then a first session within 20 days, and usually wraps within 60 days. Fees follow a sliding scale.

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.

The Help Desk

The Monday morning Family Court Help Desk explains court steps to people filing on their own. It cannot give legal advice, but it can point you to the right forms and process.

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 Stark 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 (DVCPO) 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	Family Court	Available	Up to 5 years

How it works here

The Clerk gives out protection-order packets under R.C. 3113.31, using the Ohio standard forms. There is no deposit. You file the petition, an affidavit, and, if there are children, a custody affidavit, plus the proposed ex parte order.

After you file

The court can issue a temporary ex parte order, then set a full hearing where both sides are heard. Every order goes to the Sheriff for entry into the national database so it can be enforced.

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 Division is for parents who were never married.

Were the parents never married? Then custody, parenting time, and child support are decided in the Juvenile Division of the Family Court.

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 Custody https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Sets custody and parenting time
Complaint for Parentage https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	When fatherhood is not yet established
UCCJEA custody affidavit https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domes-tic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Required with a custody filing
Working Together for Kids order https://www.starkcountyohio.gov/government/legal_judicial/family_court/resources/court_filing_forms.php	Stark Family Court	The seminar order filed with your case

THE SEMINAR COMES FIRST

A new juvenile case costs \$307 to file. Unmarried parents filing a first custody case must finish the online Working Together for Kids seminar before the first hearing, or the case can be dismissed. File the seminar order with your case.

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, scheduled through the assignment commissioner. Support changes can also start through the county child support agency.

Abuse, neglect, and dependency

These CPS cases are heard in the Juvenile Division. The court can appoint a guardian ad litem to speak for the child. To report concerns about a child's safety, contact county children services. For immediate danger, call 911.

A NOTE ON THE SEMINAR

The Working Together for Kids seminar is required for unmarried parents in a first parental-rights case. Because the case can be dismissed if it is not done before the first hearing, register and finish it early.

PART THREE

Adoption is handled by the Probate Court.

Stepparent and kinship adoptions go to the separate Stark County Probate Court.

Here is the basic shape.

CONFIRM THE PROBATE DETAILS

Adoption is handled by the Stark County Probate Court, a different court from the Family Court. Check its current address, forms, and fee with that court before you file.

1

File the petition in Probate

File the Ohio Petition for Adoption of a Minor. Add the child's birth certificate. For a stepparent, add the marriage certificate too. Ohio uses the same forms in every county.

2

Address consent

The other parent's consent is usually needed. So is the child's, if they are 12 or older. A court can waive a parent's consent for a year of no contact or support.

3

Complete the home study

Ohio law usually asks for a home study. A stepparent case can be simpler. Ask the Probate Court what your case needs.

4

Attend the hearing

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

PART FOUR

How Gavvl Law can help in Stark 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.

