

PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

Family Law in Williams County

A plain-English map for divorce, dissolution, custody, support, and adoption in Bryan and across Williams County: which court handles your case, what to file, what it costs, and when to get help.

-
- 01** See which court hears your case, and the parenting classes Williams County requires.

 - 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 Williams County.

01

Which court handles this?

The Domestic Relations Division hears divorce and dissolution. The Juvenile Division handles custody for parents who were never married. Probate handles adoption. All sit in the courthouse in Bryan.

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 Williams 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.

E-FILING DEPENDS ON THE CASE

You can e-file most divorce and juvenile cases. But adoptions and protection orders must be filed on paper. Check the deposit and the right forms before you file.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Four parts: Domestic Relations (divorce and dissolution), Juvenile Court (unmarried parents), Probate (adoption), and how Gavvl can help. The full contents are on the next page.

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

Use this guide like a map, not a rulebook.	2
Which court is actually handling your case?	4
The Domestic Relations Division ends marriages.	5
The dissolution packet, step by step.	6
Filing a divorce when you do not agree.	8
Getting orders while the case runs.	9
Custody, parenting time, and the parenting classes.	10
Spousal support, property, and other paths.	11
Changing or enforcing a Williams County order.	12
Mediation, GALs, and home investigations.	13
When safety comes first.	14
Juvenile Court is for parents who were never married.	15
Filing for custody as an unmarried parent	15
Changing orders and CPS cases.	16
Adoption is handled by the Probate Court.	17
How Gavvl Law can help in Williams County.	18
Important disclosures.	19

QUESTION ONE

Which court is actually handling your case?

One family can touch more than one court. In Williams County they all sit in the same courthouse in Bryan, on different floors. Start with the relationship, and with what you need a judge to decide.

MARRIED OR FORMERLY MARRIED

General & DR Division

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

WHERE

3rd floor. Judge Rhonda L. Fisher.

PARENTS NEVER MARRIED

Juvenile Division

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

WHERE

1st floor. Judge Karen Kampe Gallagher.

ADOPTION

Probate Court

Stepparent, kinship, and adult adoption, plus name changes and marriage licenses.

WHERE

2nd floor. Judge Gallagher, same as Juvenile.

All in one courthouse

The Domestic Relations, Juvenile, and Probate courts all sit at One Courthouse Square in Bryan. Judge Gallagher hears both Juvenile and Probate. Each court keeps its own forms, fees, and clerk, so file with the right one for your case.

PART ONE

The Domestic Relations Division ends marriages.

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

WHERE YOU FILE	WITHOUT CHILDREN	WITH CHILDREN	RESIDENCY
Clerk, 3rd floor	\$325	\$400 + \$30/child	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. Add child support if you have children.

Dissolution is built on agreement.

Both spouses file together. 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.

A PER-CHILD ADD-ON

A divorce or dissolution without children costs \$325. With children it is \$400 plus \$30 for each child aged 5 to 17, which helps cover the children's class. The deposit goes toward your real costs, and the balance is billed or refunded at the end.

DISSOLUTION

The dissolution packet, step by step.

Dissolution uses the Ohio Supreme Court forms plus a couple of local ones. 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 court sets a hearing 30 to 90 days out. Both spouses must appear and affirm the agreement. If you do not agree on everything, you need a divorce instead.

FORM	WHERE TO GET IT	WHAT IT'S FOR
SF 17 — Petition with waiver of service 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
SF 19 — 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
DR-1 and DR-2 affidavits https://www.williamscountyoh.gov	Williams County forms	Income and property; both spouses sign
DR-3 and DR-4 affidavits https://www.williamscountyoh.gov	Williams County forms	With children; parenting and insurance
Parenting plan + support worksheet https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	With children; the agreed schedule and support math
SF 18 — 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**Two classes apply**

If you have children, both parents take the Co-Parenting in Today's World class within 75 days. Children aged 5 to 17 must also attend the What About Me class. More on both on the children's page.

FINISH THE CLASS, OR RISK THE CASE

A parent who does not finish the parenting class within 75 days may not be allowed to share in custody. If no one completes it, the court can dismiss the case. Take it early.

DIVORCE

Filing a divorce when you do not agree.

Divorce is filed with the Clerk of Courts, and can be e-filed. Williams uses the Ohio Supreme Court forms plus a few local affidavits. The financial and parenting forms go in with the Complaint.

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
DR-1 — Income & Expenses https://www.williamscountyoh.gov	Williams County forms	The financial affidavit, with documents
DR-2 — Property & Debt https://www.williamscountyoh.gov	Williams County forms	Lists what you own and owe
DR-3 and DR-4 affidavits https://www.williamscountyoh.gov	Williams County forms	With children; parenting and insurance
SF 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

A restraining order on filing

When you file for divorce, annulment, or legal separation, the court's standing preliminary injunction takes effect on its own. It restrains both spouses. You do not have to ask for it.

IF YOU CANNOT FIND YOUR SPOUSE

Service can be by publication if you cannot find the other spouse. The extra deposit for publication is \$500. You arrange the notice through the court and pay the publisher.

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 who stays in the home.

Orders with notice

You ask for temporary support or parenting orders with SF Affidavit 5, backed by your DR-1 financial affidavit. The other side files a DR-1 too, due at least 10 days before a temporary-orders hearing.

Emergency orders

For a true emergency, the court can issue an ex parte order on a sworn affidavit showing urgent circumstances. The restrained party can ask for a hearing, which the court sets within 10 days.

WHAT COUNTS AS AN EMERGENCY

An emergency means a real, immediate risk — like threats of harm, abduction, or someone draining the accounts. A disagreement about the parenting schedule is not an emergency. If the danger is domestic violence, a protection order is the faster, fee-free tool. If anyone is in danger right now, call 911.

CHILDREN

Custody, parenting time, and the parenting classes.

Ohio uses specific words for custody. Williams County also asks both parents, and the children, to take short classes.

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 parents' class

Both parents take Co-Parenting in Today's World within 75 days of filing. It costs \$35 per adult. The court schedules you for the next session, held in the evening every other month in Bryan.

A LIVE CLASS FOR THE KIDS TOO

Children aged 5 to 17 must attend the What About Me class. It is held in person, not online, and the court schedules it alongside the parents' class. The fee comes out of your filing deposit.

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 Domestic Relations Division. Annulment is rare and has narrow grounds. The deposit for legal separation may differ, so confirm it with the Clerk.

A note on retirement accounts

If a divorce divides a retirement account, it usually takes a separate order, a QDRO or a DPRO, to split it with the plan. Williams charges \$100 for each one. Getting the wording right matters, so many people use a lawyer for this step.

AFTER THE DECREE

Changing or enforcing a Williams County order.

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

POST-JUDGMENT MOTION**\$280**

With children; to modify custody, parenting time, or support

NOTICE TO RELOCATE**\$25**

Filed before a parent moves with the children

CONSENT JUDGMENT ENTRY**\$50**

When both sides already agree on the change

Modifying and enforcing

To change custody or support, you file a post-judgment motion in your original case. Support enforcement can also run through the child support agency. A consent entry is cheaper when both sides already agree.

REGISTERING AN OUT-OF-STATE ORDER

The forms and fee to register a custody or support order from another state are not fully posted. Confirm the packet and deposit with the Clerk of Courts at (419) 636-1551 before you file.

HELP ALONG THE WAY

Mediation, GALs, and home investigations.

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

Mediation

The court can send a parenting dispute to mediation to help parents reach an agreement. Mediation is never used to decide a protection order.

Guardians ad litem

The court can appoint a guardian ad litem to look into the children's needs and speak to their best interests. On the juvenile side, the GAL deposit is \$2,000.

Home investigations

The court can order a home investigation to learn about a child's living situation. On the divorce side the deposit is \$600, and on the juvenile side it is \$700.

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 Williams 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	FILED	EX PARTE ORDER	FORMS
\$0 to petitioner	On paper	Same day if asked	Ohio standard set

How it works here

DVCPO petitions are heard in the General and Domestic Relations Division under R.C. 3113.31. There is no filing fee. You file in person with the Clerk on the 3rd floor; these cannot be e-filed. Ask for a same-day ex parte order in the petition.

The full hearing

A full hearing is set whether or not the ex parte order issues. Bring witnesses and evidence. A victim advocate can attend. A final order can include no contact, use of the home, and temporary parenting terms.

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

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 Division, before Judge Gallagher.

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 Supreme Court forms	Sets parentage, custody, and parenting time
Birth certificate or paternity finding https://www.williamscountyoh.gov	Attach to the complaint	Proof of the parent-child relationship
UCCJEA Parenting Proceeding Affidavit https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/forms/all-forms/domestic-relations-and-juvenile-standardized/1	Ohio Supreme Court forms	Required; no custody case without it
Financial Disclosure Form https://www.williamscountyoh.gov	Juvenile Division	For child support

COSTS AND THE CLASSES

The Juvenile Division is on the 1st floor, (419) 636-2934. A parentage or custody case costs \$200 plus \$35 for each child aged 5 to 17, which covers the children's class. The same parenting classes and 75-day deadline apply on this side too.

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. The deposit is \$200 plus \$35 per child aged 5 to 17. A motion to show cause, to enforce an order, is \$100.

Abuse, neglect, and dependency

These CPS cases are heard in the Juvenile Division. The court can appoint a guardian ad litem for the children. Low-income parents may ask for an appointed lawyer.

ESTABLISHING PATERNITY

You can establish paternity by signing an acknowledgment, through the child support agency, or in court. The agency, within Job and Family Services at (419) 636-6725, can order a DNA test. Proving paternity alone does not give a father custody or parenting time.

PART THREE

Adoption is handled by the Probate Court.

Stepparent and kinship adoptions go to the Probate Court, before Judge Gallagher. One filing rule sets adoption apart here.

ADOPTIONS ARE PAPER ONLY

Unlike most filings in Williams County, an adoption cannot be e-filed or faxed. You file it on paper with the Probate clerks on the 2nd floor. The petitioner's attorney handles all the required notices.

STEPPARENT OR KINSHIP**\$400+**

Plus a home study: \$150 stepparent, \$350 grandparent

PRIVATE ADOPTION**\$550+**

Plus a larger home-study fee

ADULT ADOPTION**\$225**

No home study for an adult adoption

1**File the petition in Probate**

File the Petition for Adoption on paper with the child's birth certificate and, for a stepparent, the marriage certificate. The Probate clerks are on the 2nd floor, (419) 636-1548.

2**Address consent**

The other parent's consent is usually needed. The court can waive it if a parent had little or no contact, or gave no support, for the year before filing.

3**Complete the home study**

The court provides a qualified assessor for the home study. The fee is the home-investigation amount listed above.

4**Attend the hearing**

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

PART FOUR

How Gavvl Law can help in Williams 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

This guide explains how things generally work in Williams County, but it cannot account for the facts of your case. 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 situation, talk with a licensed Ohio attorney.

FEES AND PROCEDURES CHANGE

The court information in this guide was verified as of June 11, 2026 from official court sources. Court fees, forms, and procedures change. Always confirm current fees and requirements with the Williams 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

Gavvl Law attorneys are licensed to practice law in Ohio. This guide describes Ohio law and Williams County procedure only. Advertising material. Gavvl Law LLC, 1677 Old Henderson Road, Columbus, Ohio 43220. Attorney responsible for content: Stephanie Green, Esq., Managing Partner. Privacy: gavvl.com/privacy-policy.