

# *County of Adams*

Courts' Self-Help Center – Pamphlet

## INFORMATION ON SELF HELP FORMS AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR:

**DIVORCE**

**CUSTODY**

**PROTECTION FROM  
ABUSE**

**SUPPORT &  
PATERNITY**

**DISCLAIMER:** Court staff is not able to give you legal advice or help you fill out/complete forms. The information in this pamphlet is not a substitute for professional legal advice. The Court, the Adams County Bar Association and the Family Law Committee assume no responsibility and accept no liability for actions taken by users of these documents, including reliance on their contents. If you need assistance with the forms or need help with legal questions, it is recommended that you consult with a licensed attorney.

*Provided as a public service by the  
Adams County Bar Association*

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## DIVORCE

A divorce legally ends your marriage. It is recommended that you at least speak with a lawyer to learn your legal rights. Obtaining the services of a lawyer is highly recommended if you wish to raise issues in addition to just legally ending your marriage (e.g. making claims to items of property or money from your marriage).

If you decide to represent yourself in a divorce action, self-help forms and instructions are located at the Adams County Law Library or on the County website. You can find the addresses on the back of this pamphlet.

Representing yourself in a divorce action is very time-consuming and difficult. You **MUST** follow the same state and local rules and procedures as lawyers are obligated to follow. The Court will not allow you to skip any procedure because you “did not know how or when” to do something in your divorce action.

## CUSTODY

If you can't afford a lawyer you can begin a custody case or modify or enforce a custody order on your own.

It is always recommended that you obtain the services of a lawyer. However, if you decide to represent yourself in a custody action, self-help forms and instructions are located at the Adams County Law Library or on the County website. The addresses are on the back of this pamphlet.

Please read and carefully follow the instructions when filling out the forms, as well as the instructions on what to do once the forms have been filled out.

## **CHILD & SPOUSAL SUPPORT**

Child and spousal support actions are initiated by filing a complaint. You may file in person at the Domestic Relations Section (DRS), or online by visiting the website

<https://www.humanservices.state.pa.us/csww/>, and selecting "Request Support Services."

You may call the DRS to obtain general information. However, visiting the office in person may be more useful.

There is a website to obtain additional information, including access to your specific support case, at <https://www.humanservices.state.pa.us/csww/> or you can call 1-800-932-0211.

Both the Plaintiff and the Defendant have the right to be represented by their own lawyers in support proceedings. There are special circumstances in which the Court will appoint a lawyer to represent a person involved in a support matter. For example, if a Defendant is scheduled for a contempt hearing or a hearing on the issue of paternity and cannot afford a lawyer, the Defendant can apply to have the Court appoint an attorney. You can contact the DRS to obtain an Application for Counsel. The application will be reviewed by the Court to determine if you are eligible. Additionally, if you are a Defendant in a support matter and are under the age of eighteen (18), the Court will automatically appoint a lawyer to represent you during any support conferences or hearings, unless you make other arrangements with a lawyer of your own choosing.

The District Attorney's office will represent Plaintiffs in support appeals to the Court.

## **PROTECTION FROM ABUSE**

If you are a victim of domestic violence, you can get free legal help to get a civil Protection From Abuse (PFA) order. Other free services, such as counseling and emergency housing, are also available.

**Legal Help:** MidPenn Legal Services offers *free legal services* to victims of domestic violence who need a PFA order. Their address and telephone number are on the back of this pamphlet.

If the Court is closed, you can get an emergency PFA order from the on-call Magisterial District Judge (MDJ). Call (717) 334-8101, ask for the on-call MDJ, and explain that you want to get a PFA order. You do not need an attorney to do this, but MidPenn can represent you once the case has been filed at the courthouse. Survivors and Safe Home (see below) can help with this process.

**Self-Representation:** It is always best to have a lawyer represent you. However, you can file a PFA on your own. Self-help forms and instructions are located in the Domestic Relations Office, the Adams County Law Library, Adams County Children & Youth Services, or online at the Adams County web site. The addresses are on the back of this pamphlet. Survivors or Safe Home (see below) may also be able to assist you.

**Other Help:** Other important *free services*, such as counseling and emergency shelter, are offered by:

- Survivors, Inc. Phone: (717) 334-9777  
Website: <http://enddvsa.org>
- Safe Home Phone: (717) 632-0007  
Website: <http://www.ywcahanover.org/what-we-do/safe-home/>

## PATERNITY

Establishing paternity means proving the identity of the father of the child.

If a supposed father who has not previously acknowledged paternity wishes to challenge paternity, the Domestic Relations Section (DRS) of the Adams County Court can perform paternity testing. If testing establishes paternity, the costs of paternity testing will usually be assigned to the father, who requested the test. If testing does not establish paternity, the costs of paternity testing will be assigned to the County or the Plaintiff. If the supposed father wishes to acknowledge paternity without testing or Court proceedings, he may do so by signing the necessary forms at the DRS.

Contact the DRS at the address and/or telephone number listed on the back of this pamphlet for more information. DRS staff may not be able to return phone calls, but visiting the DRS office in person will be useful to get answers to your questions and to obtain detailed instructions regarding paternity.

Paternity issues can also be determined in other types of cases, including custody cases.

**NOTE ON COURT COSTS:** When you file a divorce or custody complaint, you must pay a filing fee. If you cannot afford to pay the filing fee or other costs you may ask the Court to excuse you from paying them. See the packet entitled "In Forma Pauperis (IFP)" located in the Law Library and on the Adams County website.

## IMPORTANT ADDRESSES, PHONE NUMBERS, AND WEBSITE ADDRESSES

### Adams County Courthouse

117 Baltimore Street, Gettysburg, PA 17325

Hours: Monday through Friday  
8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

- The Adams County Law Library (3rd floor)  
Self-help forms for Divorce, Custody, Protection from Abuse and other cases.
- Court Administrator's Office (4th floor)  
For help finding an attorney  
Phone: (717) 337-9846

### Adams County website

<http://www.adamscounty.us>

- For self-help forms click on "Courts' Self-Help Center" under "Courts at a Glance," located on the right side of the website.

### Domestic Relations Section

(Support and Paternity information)

525 Boyds School Road  
Suite 600

Gettysburg, PA 17325

Phone: (717) 337-9804

Hours: Monday through Friday  
8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

### MidPenn Legal Services

(Free legal help to obtain a  
Protection From Abuse order)

128 Breckenridge Street

Gettysburg, PA 17325

Phone: 1-800-326-9177