

## PATERNITY

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

If a supposed father wishes to challenge paternity, the Domestic Relations Section (DRS) of the Adams County Court can arrange for 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 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.

## IMPORTANT ADDRESSES, PHONE NUMBERS AND WEBSITE ADDRESSES:

**Adams County Courthouse**, 111-117  
Baltimore Street, Gettysburg, PA 17325. Hours of all offices are Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

- The Adams County Law Library (3rd floor) (self-help forms for Divorce, Custody, and Protection from Abuse cases)
- The Domestic Relation Section (1st floor) (Support and Paternity information) Phone: (717) 337-9804
- Court Administrator (4th floor) (for help finding an attorney)  
Phone: (717) 337-9846

**Adams County website**: [www.adamscounty.us](http://www.adamscounty.us)  
(for self-help forms click on “Courts: Self Help Forms” under “County Quick Links”)

**Mid Penn Legal Services** (free legal help to get a protection from abuse order)  
128 Breckenridge Street  
Gettysburg, PA 17325  
Phone: (717) 334-7623

**Family Group Decision Making** (free help in resolving custody disputes without going to court)  
Phone: 337-5809 or 253-5969

## *Information on Self-Help Forms and Instructions for:*

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**DIVORCE**

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**CUSTODY**

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**PROTECTION FROM ABUSE**

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**SUPPORT & PATERNITY**

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**Note:** *County employees at the Courthouse will be able to give you the forms and instructions to get you started but will not be able to fill out the forms for you, assist you in filling out the forms or answer legal questions because they are not lawyers.*

## **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 other than legally ending your marriage (i.e. 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 correct rules and procedures, both state and county, as is required of lawyers. 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 a custody order on your own behalf.

It is always recommended to 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.

If you would like to try to resolve your custody issues without going to court, you can call Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) at the number on the back of this pamphlet. FGDM is a free service which works with families to resolve certain issues, such as custody disputes.

**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 “How to ask to be excused from paying court costs” located in the Law Library and on the Adams County website.

## **CHILD & SPOUSAL SUPPORT**

Child and spousal support actions are initiated by filing a complaint at the Domestic Relations Section (DRS). 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 you specific support case, at [www.childsupport.state.pa.us](http://www.childsupport.state.pa.us) 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 one. 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:** Mid Penn 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 courts are 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 at the Office of the Prothonotary, the Adams County Law Library, or online at the 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: [www.survivorsservices.org](http://www.survivorsservices.org)
- Safe Home  
Phone: (717) 632-0007  
Website: [www.ywcahanover.org/safehome.html](http://www.ywcahanover.org/safehome.html)