

HOW TO GET A DIVORCE (NO CHILDREN)

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What you must do to complete your case.

WARNING:

You cannot use this guide and the forms unless you have an address for your spouse or partner.

This guide gives general instructions on how to complete a simple divorce case.

It cannot and does not cover everything that might happen in a divorce case. If you do not understand whether these instructions apply to your case, you should speak with a lawyer.

How divorce cases are handled by a judge can vary from county to county.

There may be requirements in your county that are not covered in these instructions. Ask the Circuit Clerk if your county has local rules and, if so, where you can get a copy.

INTRODUCTION TO GETTING A DIVORCE IN ILLINOIS (NO CHILDREN)

NOTE: If there are any words or terms used in these instructions that you do not understand, please visit Illinois Legal Aid Online at illinoislegalaid.org/lexicon/glossary. For more information about going to court including how to fill out and file forms, call or text Illinois Court Help at 833-411-1121 or go to ilcourthelp.gov.

These instructions apply to marriages and civil unions. If the instructions say:

- “marriage” it also means “civil union”; AND
- “spouse” it also means “partner.”

Can I ask the court for a divorce in Illinois?

You can ask for a divorce if:

- You are married;
- You or your spouse has lived in Illinois for at least 90 days; AND
- There is no other divorce case already filed and still pending anywhere else (not dismissed).

NOTE: If your spouse is on active military service, you can ask for a divorce, but the court might not be able to give you a divorce.

What forms do I need to ask the court for a divorce?

Below are some of the common forms used in divorce cases. Depending on your specific situation, you may not need all of the forms listed or you may need other forms not listed here.

- **Petition for Dissolution of Marriage/Civil Union (Divorce No Children):** asks the court for a divorce and gives information needed to begin a divorce case.
- **Certificate of Dissolution of Marriage*:** lists information about your case that is sent to the Illinois Department of Public Health after your divorce is final.
- **Summons:** tells your spouse that you are asking the court for a divorce.
- **Entry of Appearance:** is completed by your spouse to tell the court that they do not need to receive a *Summons*.
- **Judgment of Dissolution of Marriage/Civil Union (Divorce No Children):** is used by the judge to grant or deny your divorce. If granted, the *Judgment* will also divide property, assign debt, and determine whether spousal support will be paid.

The email address (if you have one) and mailing address you put on the forms is where important legal documents will be sent to you. You should use an email account that you do not share with anyone else and that you check

every day. If you do not check your email every day, you may miss important information, notice of court dates, or documents from other parties.

Where can I find the forms I need?

*You can get the Certificate of Dissolution of Marriage at the Circuit Clerk’s office.

You can find the rest of the forms at: illinoiscourts.gov/documents-and-forms/approved-forms.

What information will help me fill out the court forms?

- Date you were married;
- Date you were physically separated;
- City, county, state, and country where you were married;
- Current home address for your spouse or other address where your spouse can be found;
- List of all personal property, including bank accounts that you and your spouse own together or separately;
- List of all real estate that you and your spouse have an interest in together or separately own (with or without a mortgage), purchasing contract for deed, etc.;
- List of all claims for money for injuries or damages that you or your spouse have suffered;
- List of all pension and retirement accounts that you or your spouse have; AND
- List of all the debts that you and your spouse have made since you got married, together or separately.

What costs will I need to pay to ask the court for a divorce?

- **Filing Fee:** to file your forms with the Circuit Clerk of the Circuit Court in the county where you are filing your divorce.
- **Service Fee:** to serve the *Summons* on your spouse.
- **Certified Copy Fee (optional):** to get certified copies of the *Judgment of Dissolution of Marriage/Civil Union (Divorce No Children)*.
- **Transcript Fee:** to get a written recording of your divorce court hearing. Some counties require this.

What if I cannot afford to pay the costs?

- If you cannot afford to pay the fees, you can ask the court to file for free or at a reduced cost by filing the *Application for Waiver of Court Fees* at: illinoiscourts.gov/documents-and-forms/approved-forms.

Who will assist me during my divorce case?

- **Circuit Clerk:** The Circuit Clerk will accept your divorce forms, collect fees for filing your divorce case, and help schedule a court date. The Circuit Clerk cannot give you legal advice.

- **Sheriff:** you will ask the sheriff in the county where your spouse lives to serve a *Summons* on your spouse.
- **Judge:** you will see and speak to the judge at your court dates. The judge will decide whether you get a divorce. The judge cannot give you legal advice.

When will I be divorced?

You are divorced when the judge signs the *Judgment for Dissolution of Marriage/Civil Union (Divorce No Children)*.

STEP 1: COMPLETE FORMS.

A. *Petition for Dissolution of Marriage/Civil Union (Divorce No Children)*

To help you fill out the form, the *Petition* has line-by-line instructions on the left-side of the form. Below is more helpful information.

Section 5(e): Reason for Divorce

All divorces are granted because of irreconcilable differences.

- **Irreconcilable Differences:** means you and your spouse do not get along anymore and you do not want to be married.
- If you have been separated 6 months or more, tell this to the judge.
- If you have been separated less than 6 months you will have to show the judge that you and your spouse:
 - Separated because you cannot get along anymore; AND
 - Tried to fix the problems in your marriage, but could not, or the problems are so bad that trying to fix them is not best for your family.

Section 7: Debts

You must tell the court if you and your spouse have debts from the marriage that are still owed. If you and your spouse cannot agree on how to divide the debt, the judge will decide who is responsible for each debt.

Sections 8, 9, 10 & 11: Personal Property, Real Estate Pension/Retirement Accounts & Money Claims

You must tell the court if you and your spouse own personal property (clothing/furniture), real estate, pension/retirement accounts, or money claims. If you and your spouse cannot agree on how to divide the property, the judge will decide who gets the property.

Section 12: Maintenance/Spousal Support

Maintenance/ spousal support is money paid from one spouse to the other on a regular basis.

- To get maintenance/spousal support you must show the court there is a good reason such as a long marriage, poor health, or an inability to support yourself.
- The judge is not required to order maintenance/spousal support.

Section G: Former Name

You must tell the court if you want to go back to using a former name.

- The judge can allow you to return to any name you have used before.
- The judge cannot allow you to begin using a new name you have never used before.
- If you want to use a name you have never used before you will have to start a separate court case by filing a *Request for Name Change (Adult)*. You can find the forms at: illinoiscourts.gov/documents-and-forms/approved-forms.

B. Certificate of Dissolution of Marriage

You must complete this form and file it with the Circuit Clerk.

- Get this form from the Circuit Clerk.
- If you are representing yourself you will leave box 17 blank.
- Boxes 18 and 19 are for the Circuit Clerk to complete so leave those blank.

C. Notice Form

Complete one of these forms:

1. **Summons:** use this if you are going to have the sheriff serve a copy of your forms on your spouse; OR
2. **Entry of Appearance:** use this if your spouse agrees that the sheriff does not have to serve them with a copy of your forms.

You can find these forms at:

illinoiscourts.gov/documents-and-forms/approved-forms.

STEP 2: WHAT DO I DO AFTER I FILL OUT MY FORMS?

File your forms with the Circuit Clerk in the county where your court case should be filed.

- You must file the forms with the trial court by the filing deadline that applies to your case.
- You must electronically file (e-file) court documents unless (1) you are an inmate in a prison or jail and you do not have a lawyer, (2) you have a disability

that keeps you from e-filing, or (3) you qualify for an exemption from e-filing.

- You will qualify for an exemption if: (1) you do not have internet or computer access at home and it would be difficult for you to travel to a place where you could use a computer; (2) you have trouble reading or speaking in English, or (3) you tried to e-file your documents, but you were unable to complete the process because the equipment or assistance you need is not available.
- If you qualify for an exemption, fill out a *Certification for Exemption from E-Filing* found here: illinoiscourts.gov/documents-and-forms/approved-forms.
- File the original and 1 copy of your forms and the *Certification* with the trial court clerk's office in person or by mail.
- To e-file, create an account with an e-filing service provider.
 - Visit efile.illinoiscourts.gov/service-providers.htm to select a service provider. Some service providers are free while others charge a processing fee. For instructions on how to e-file for free with Odyssey eFileL, see the self-help user guides here: illinoiscourts.gov/self-help/how-to-e-file/.
- If you do not have access to a computer or if you need help e-filing, take your form to the Circuit Clerk's office where you can use a public computer terminal to e-file your forms.
 - You can bring your forms on paper or saved on a flash drive.
 - The terminal will have a scanner and computer that you can use to e-file your form.

Serve your spouse with copies of your *Petition for Dissolution of Marriage/Civil Union (Divorce No Children) and Summons*.

If you and the person you're sending the forms to have an email address, you must send them by email or by notification through the e-filing system. If you or the person you're sending the forms to does not have an email address, you may give them to the other parties by personal hand delivery, mail, or third-party commercial carrier (for example, FedEx or UPS).

- If your spouse signs an *Entry of Appearance*, you do not have to have your spouse served by the sheriff. You are ready to get a court date (skip to "Ask for a court date" below).
- If your spouse did not sign an *Entry of Appearance*, then staple the *Summons* to the front of the copy of *Petition* that will go to your spouse.

- In person or by mail, ask the sheriff in the county where the case was filed to serve your *Summons* and your *Petition* on your spouse.
- In Person
 - Bring 2 copies of your *Summons* and your *Petition* to the sheriff's office.
 - Pay the sheriff's fees OR give the sheriff a copy of your *Order for Waiver of Court Fees* (if you have one) to not be charged a fee.
- By Mail
 - Mail 2 copies of your *Summons* and your *Petition* to the sheriff's office.
 - Include the *Letter to the Sheriff* found at: illinoiscourts.gov/documents-and-forms/approved-forms.
 - Include a self-addressed and stamped envelope for the sheriff to mail the *Return of Service* to you.
 - Pay the sheriff's fees OR mail the sheriff a copy of your *Order for Waiver of Court Fees* (if you have one) to not be charged a fee.
- If your spouse does NOT live in the same county or state where the case was filed:
 - Get the name, address, and telephone number of the sheriff for the county or the state where your spouse lives.
 - Call the sheriff in that county to find out:
 - If it is the correct sheriff's department for the address where you want your spouse served;
 - The address where you should bring or mail your *Summons* and *Petition*;
 - The number of copies of your *Summons* and *Petition* to bring or send; AND
 - The sheriff's fees for service and if they will honor your *Order for Waiver of Court Fees* (if you have one). If the sheriff is in Illinois, the sheriff must honor the fee waiver.

Confirm the sheriff served your *Petition* on your spouse.

- After the sheriff serves your spouse with your *Petition*, they will fill out the *Return of Service* section of your *Summons* form and file it with the Circuit Clerk or mail it to you.
- If the sheriff files the *Summons* with the completed *Return of Service* directly with the Circuit Clerk, call the Circuit Clerk to find out if it has been filed. If it has been filed, ask the Circuit Clerk how to get a copy.
- If the sheriff mails the *Summons* with the completed *Return of Service* to you, make a copy for yourself, file the original with the Circuit Clerk, and have the Clerk file stamp your copy.

- If the sheriff was not able to serve your spouse, ask them why. You should try to fix the problem and then fill out another *Summons* and ask the sheriff to try to serve your spouse again.

Wait for your spouse to file a response with the Circuit Clerk.

- Once the sheriff serves your forms on your spouse, your spouse has 30 days to file an *Appearance* and a response with the Circuit Clerk.
- If you do not get a copy of your spouse's *Appearance* and response within the 30 days, call the Circuit Clerk to ask if there is an *Appearance* and response in the file. If there is, ask the Circuit Clerk to send you a copy or go to the Circuit Clerk's office to pick it up.
- If your spouse files an *Appearance* and response, you may then get a court date from the Circuit Clerk.
- After the 30 days from the date of service, you may get a court date from the Circuit Clerk whether or not your spouse filed an *Appearance* and response.

Ask for a court date.

- Ask the Circuit Clerk if you have to schedule a court date or if one will be scheduled automatically.
- If you need to schedule the court date, ask the Circuit Clerk how to do so. The Circuit Clerk may schedule the court date or you may have to speak with other court staff.
- When you get your court date, ask if the court will send notice of the hearing to your spouse or if you need to.
- If you need to send notice, complete a Notice of Court Date.

Make sure you know how you are to attend your court date.

Your court date could be in person, by phone or by video. If it is by phone or video it is called a "Remote Appearance." Call the Circuit Clerk or visit their website for more information. To find the phone number for your Circuit Clerk, visit illinoiscourts.gov/courts/circuit-court/circuit-court-clerks/

A. AGREEMENT

Get ready for your court date.

- Decide and write down all the things you and your spouse have agreed on including:
 - What property will be awarded to each of you;
 - Who will be responsible for each of the debts; AND
 - Whether either of you will receive maintenance and how much.
- Follow the instructions on the *Judgment of Dissolution of Marriage/Civil Union (Divorce No Children)* to complete only those sections you can fill out in advance.

Go to your court date.

- You should have either received a court date and time from the Circuit Clerk in person OR on a written notice from the Circuit Clerk. If you cannot find your court date and time, call the Circuit Clerk.
- Bring these items with you to court:
 - Copies of all the documents you filed with the Circuit Clerk; AND
 - A *Judgment of Dissolution of Marriage/Civil Union (Divorce No Children)*.
- Get to the courthouse at least 30 minutes early.
- Go to the courtroom number listed on your court

form. If your forms do not have a courtroom number look for a list of cases at the courthouse or ask the Circuit Clerk.

- Check in with the courtroom staff and wait for your name and case number to be called.

- When your case is called, walk to the judge and introduce yourself.

- If your court date is by phone or video:
 - Make sure to have the call-in or login information for your court date and make sure your technology is working.
 - Follow the instructions on the court notice you received. Call the Circuit Clerk or Circuit Court or visit their websites for specific technology instructions.
 - Follow these recommendations to appear by phone or video: illinoiscourts.gov/self-help/court-by-phone-or-video

STEP 3: HOW TO GET READY FOR COURT AND PRESENT YOUR CASE TO THE JUDGE.

Follow the instructions in **Part A** if you and your spouse agree on all issues and your spouse will attend the court date with you.

Follow the instructions in **Part B** if you and your spouse do not agree on all issues. This includes cases where your spouse has not filed an *Appearance* or response in the case and may not appear at the court date.

Present your case to the judge.

- Give the judge your prepared *Judgment of Dissolution of Marriage/Civil Union (Divorce No Children)*.
- Tell the judge you and your spouse have an agreement and the details of that agreement.
- If the judge approves your agreement, the *Judgment* will be signed.
 - Get a copy of the *Judgment* that was entered by the judge.

B. NO AGREEMENT**Get ready for your court date.**

- Decide and write down:
 - What you want to ask the judge to do for you;
 - What you will say to the judge if asked to tell your side of the case; AND
 - Questions you have for witnesses, if there are any.
- Gather and make copies of pictures and documents you want the judge to see. Bring the original for the judge and one copy for you and your spouse in the case.
- If you want the judge to hear from other people, those people will have to come to court and be witnesses (*in most cases, you cannot bring in written statements of witnesses*).
- Follow the instructions on the *Judgment of Dissolution of Marriage/Civil Union (Divorce No Children)* to complete only those sections you can fill out in advance.

Go to your court date.

- You should have either received a court date and time from the Circuit Clerk in person OR on a written notice from your spouse or Circuit Clerk. If you cannot find your court date and time, call the Circuit Clerk.
- Bring these items with you to court:
 - Copies of all the documents you filed with the Circuit Clerk;
 - Any witnesses you want to testify and any documents you want the judge to look at; AND
 - A *Judgment of Dissolution of Marriage/Civil Union (Divorce No Children)*.
- Get to the courthouse at least 30 minutes early.
- Go to the courtroom number listed on your court form. If your forms do not have a courtroom number look for a list of cases at the courthouse or ask the Circuit Clerk.

- Check in with the courtroom staff and wait for your name and case number to be called.
- When your case is called, walk to the judge and introduce yourself.
- If your court date is by phone or video:
 - Make sure to have the call-in or login information for your court date and make sure your technology is working.
 - Follow the instructions on the court notice you received. Call the Circuit Clerk or Circuit Court or visit their websites for specific technology instructions.
 - Follow these recommendations to appear by phone or video: illinoiscourts.gov/self-help/court-by-phone-or-video

Present your case to the judge.**1. If your spouse does not come to court.**

- Give the judge your prepared *Judgment of Dissolution of Marriage/Civil Union (Divorce No Children)*.
- Tell the judge what you want ordered in the *Judgment*.
- Tell the judge if you have documents to present or witnesses to testify.
- The judge will decide if documents and witnesses are necessary.
- The judge might ask you questions rather than look at documents and listen to witnesses.
- If the judge gives you the divorce, the *Judgment* will be signed.
 - Get a copy of the *Judgment* that was entered by the judge.
 - If your spouse was not in court to get a copy, you must send them a copy by 5:00 p.m. on the date you get the *Judgment*. Fill out and file a *Proof of Delivery* court form with the Circuit Clerk to show that you sent the copy. You can find the *Proof of Delivery* at: illinoiscourts.gov/documents-and-forms/approved-forms.

2. If your spouse comes to court.

- Tell the judge your side of the case and answer questions.
- Show evidence including documents and photos.
- Give a copy to the judge and a copy to your spouse. Be prepared to explain why the document or photo is important.
- Question witnesses.
 - Tell the judge the name of your witnesses.

- Ask the witnesses questions you prepared in advance.
 - The judge and your spouse can ask questions of your witnesses when you are done.
- The judge decides whether the documents, photos, or witness testimony can be considered in making a decision about your case.
 - Tell the judge you have brought a *Judgment of Dissolution of Marriage/Civil Union (Divorce No Children)*.

What do I do when my spouse presents their case?

(If your spouse does not appear for the court date, this part will not happen.)

- Your spouse will also get to present their case by testifying, giving the judge evidence, and questioning witnesses.
- You will get to see any documents and photos your spouse brings to court. If you do not think the judge should consider them in making a decision about your case, tell the judge why.
- You may ask questions of your spouse's witnesses. Write down your questions while they are speaking to your spouse or judge.

What happens after both sides present their case? (If your spouse does not appear for the court date, this will happen after you present your case to the judge.)

- The judge has to make a decision. The decision is called the *Judgment of Dissolution of Marriage/Civil Union (Divorce No Children)*.
- If the judge needs more information to make a decision, the judge may set up another court date. Make sure you understand what information is needed and get it before the new court date.

If the judge needs more time to make a decision, the judge will let you know the decision later by mailing a court order or at another court date.

- If the judge has enough information, the judge may decide right then and fill out the *Judgment of Dissolution of Marriage/Civil Union (Divorce No Children)*.
 - Get a copy of the *Judgment* that was entered by the judge.

STEP 4: WHAT DO I DO AFTER THE COURT DATE?

1. If you got permission to go back to a former name, ask the Circuit Clerk to certify your copy of the *Judgment of Dissolution of Marriage/Civil Union (Divorce No Children)*. There may be a fee for this.
2. The Secretary of State and Social Security Administration will want to see a certified copy of the judgment before changing your name in their records.
3. Keep your copies of all of your court papers in a safe place. If you lose any court papers that were filed with the Circuit Clerk, you can get another copy there. There may be a charge for those copies.
4. In Cook County, and in some other counties, the judge may ask you to get a transcript of the court hearing from the court reporter for the court file. Some judges will not sign your *Judgment of Dissolution of Marriage/Civil Union (Divorce No Children)* until you return the transcript to the court.
5. In Cook County, if the judge orders you to get a transcript follow these steps:
 - a. If you have a fee waiver, ask the judge to enter an Order for Free Transcript;
 - b. Call the court reporter's office at (312) 603-8405 to make sure the transcript is ready; if you do not have the Order for Free Transcript, ask what you will be charged for the transcript;
 - c. When the transcript is ready, pick it up at 69 W. Washington St., 9th Floor, Chicago; you will need to bring the Order for Free Transcript or pay the transcript fee; AND
 - d. Sign the last page of the transcript and return it to the judge's clerk in the courtroom where you got the divorce.
6. In other counties, if the judge orders you to get a transcript speak with the Circuit Clerk for more information about how to do that.
7. Send a copy of the *Judgment* to your spouse either by hand or by mail and file a *Proof of Delivery* with the Circuit Clerk. You can find the *Proof of Delivery* at: illinoiscourts.gov/documents-and-forms/approved-forms.