



## Research Guide for Self-Represented Litigants: Family Law

### Getting Started

Legal research involves identifying the statutes and case law that apply to your case. The easiest way to start your legal research is with “secondary sources,” which are materials that discuss and explain the law but are not the law itself. Many resources can be found for free online, but this guide also points you to books and subscription databases that you may be able to use at your local public law library.

This guide is specially focused on family law. For basic information regarding legal research and starting a case, see our guide “Starting and Responding to a Civil Case.”

### Important Terms

- Dissolution of marriage – divorce
- Irreconcilable differences – when a couple cannot come to a solution for problems in their marriage. Grounds for divorce in Illinois.
- Contested divorce – when spouses disagree on issues related to the divorce, including but not limited to whether or not to get a divorce and where children should live.
- Uncontested divorce – when both spouses agree on how issues related to a divorce should be handled.
- Parenting plan – a written plan that dictates which parent will make which decisions for the child, where the child will live, and when each parent can spend time with the child
- Allocation of parental responsibility – when the court divides the parenting time, child support, and decision-making responsibility for parents (formerly called “custody”)
- Child support – money that one parent pays to another parent for costs associated with supporting their child
- Voluntary Acknowledgement of Paternity – a document that unmarried parents may sign to create a legally binding a parent-child relationship

### Online Resources

#### **Legal Self-Help**

- Illinois Legal Aid Online: <https://www.illinoislegalaid.org/legal-information/family-safety>
- Nolo: <https://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/family-law-divorce>
- Illinois State Bar Association: <https://www.isba.org/public/yourfamily>
- American Bar Association: <https://www.isba.org/ibj/subjects/familylaw>
- FindLaw: <https://family.findlaw.com/>

#### **Government Agencies**

- Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services, Child Support Services: <https://www.illinois.gov/hfs/childsupport>
  - Illinois Child Support Estimator: <https://cscwebext.hfs.illinois.gov/CscWebEx/app/estimator?execution=e1s1>
- Illinois Department of Children & Family Services: <https://www2.illinois.gov/agencies/DCFS>

#### **Forms**

- Divorce Forms: <http://www.illinoiscourts.gov/Forms/approved/divorce/divorce.asp>

### **Resources at Your Local Law Library**

You will find many resources available for free at your local public law library that are not available on the internet. These may include online subscription databases, like Westlaw and LexisNexis. They also include the library's book collection. Check for these books or ask a librarian to help you find something similar.

**IICLE's** – stands for Illinois Institute of Continuing Legal Education. These books offer easy-to-understand analysis on a wide variety of legal issues.

- *Family Law: Dissolutions of Marriage Court Proceedings* (2017)
- *Family Law: Preliminary Considerations in Dissolution Actions* (2015)
- *Family Law: Child-Related Issues in Dissolution Actions* (2018)
- *Family Law: Property and Financial Aspects of Dissolution Actions* (2019)
- *Contemporary Relationships and the Law* (2015)

### **Books on Divorce**

- *Gitlin on Divorce: A Guide to Illinois Matrimonial Law*, by Gunnar J. Gitlin (LexisNexis)
- *Divorce in Illinois: The Legal Process, Your Rights, and What to Expect*, by Steven N. Peskind (Addicus Books)
- *Divorce Proceedings in Illinois: What You Need to Know*, by Mark D. Brent (Aspatore)
- *Nolo's Essential Guide to Divorce*, by Emily Doskow (Nolo)
- *The Divorce Trial Manual: From Initial Interview to Closing Argument*, by Lynne Z. Gold-Bikin & Stephen A. Kolodny (American Bar Association)
- *ABA Guide to Marriage, Divorce, and Families* (American Bar Association)

### **Books on Child Custody**

- *Nolo's Essential Guide to Child Custody & Support*, by Emily Doskow (Nolo)
- *Building a Parenting Agreement that Works*, by Mimi Zimmelman (Nolo)
- *Parenting Plans: Meeting the Challenges with Facts and Analysis*, by Daniel J. Hynan (American Bar Association)

### **Special Topics**

- *The Military Divorce Handbook: A Practical Guide to Representing Military Personnel and Their Families*, by Mark E. Sullivan (American Bar Association, Section of Family Law)
- *The Special Needs Child and Divorce: A Practical Guide to Evaluating and Handling Cases*, by Margaret "Pegi" S. Price (American Bar Association, Section of Family Law)
- *Divorce After 50: Your Guide to the Unique Legal & Financial Challenges*, by Janice Green (Nolo)

### **Seeking Additional Help**

Law librarians may help you find the books listed in this guide or other suitable replacements if these are not available. They may have their own resource guides or recommendations. In general, library staff can help you find information and develop search strategies, but they are unable to provide legal advice or interpret the law.