

Your Case, Step by Step

Dissolution of Marriage • Jackson County, Missouri

Where your case is now, what comes next, and roughly how long each part takes.

STAGE 1 • GETTING STARTED

Before your case is filed

STEP 1

We agree to work together

You sign the engagement letter, the initial retainer deposit is paid, and you send back the **intake form** — which carries the information the court requires on its confidential filing sheet.

These items set the pace. The clock in Step 2 starts when they are back.

STEP 2

I draft the petition

I prepare the petition and everything that opens the case — including **Form 17**, filled in from your intake form, and usually a motion asking the court to appoint a special process server. You review it all before anything is filed.

Usually 3–7 days from the day your engagement letter and intake form come back.

STEP 3

Your homework

1402B, your income and expenses, and **1402A**, your assets and debts. If there are children, we also start on the parenting plan — I send you a template so you are familiar with the basic terms, then we customize it for you and your children's needs.

I typically ask for these back within a couple of weeks.

STAGE 2 • OPENING THE CASE

The clock starts here

STEP 4

Filing

I e-file the petition, **Form 17** with your confidential information, and the service documents with the Circuit Clerk. Court costs are \$144.50 plus a small surcharge.

These court costs come out of the retainer you have already paid. They are not an additional charge.

The clerk takes 3–5 days to issue the summons. If we are using a special process server, the court must also sign an order appointing them first.

STEP 5

Service

Your spouse is formally notified by **personal delivery** of the petition, summons and the other documents, usually by a special process server (\$100–\$120). A cooperating spouse can instead sign a waiver of service and entry of appearance.

WHY A SPECIAL PROCESS SERVER

The sheriff's office is slower, and service often does not happen until the very end of the time allowed. A special process server gives us control — sometimes service happens within hours of the summons being issued — and I can tell you when the server is out attempting service, and exactly when your spouse was served. That matters if you need to be ready for the reaction, or to arrange somewhere else to stay.

Filing to service is typically 7–10 days.

STEP 6

The clock starts at service

The first real deadline is the answer.

Your spouse has 30 days from the date of service to file a responsive pleading admitting or denying each paragraph of the petition, and typically files a counter-petition at the same time — which I then answer within 30 days.

The server returns a notice of service, executed and notarized, which I e-file with the court. That is the document those 30 days run from.

No judgment can be entered until **30 days after filing**, no exceptions. And within **60 days** the parties exchange standard Jackson County discovery.

A word about the waiting

Most of a divorce case is waiting — on the clerk, on service, on the other side, on a judge's calendar. The waiting is the hard part, not the hearings. Expect stretches where you feel lost and cannot tell whether anything is happening at all. That is normal, and it is not a sign your case has gone wrong. When it hits, come back to this page: it will tell you roughly where you are and what usually comes next.

What carries people through is not what happens in the courtroom. It is the ordinary days — real sleep, real meals, moving your body, people you can talk to. **Start this now, not when the case is over.** You will be making decisions that shape the next several years. **A clear head — and your ability to work this case alongside me — is what it runs on, and that runs down when you are exhausted.** Protect it like any other part of your case. And call me — not knowing is worse than any answer I can give you.

Both paths are on the back →

Yes — Uncontested

Typically 60–90 days

Agreements drafted and signed

A property settlement agreement divides property and debts. If there are children, a parenting plan and a Form 14 support calculation are included.

Parenting class IF CHILDREN

Jackson County requires FOCIS — about three hours, \$47 per parent, online or in person. In a truly uncontested case where the parties are in agreement, the court will typically waive it.

Judgment submitted

I send the signed property settlement agreement and joint stipulated parenting plan to the court with a proposed judgment and Form 14.

You will not go to court. An uncontested case is finished by **affidavit** — sworn written testimony instead of testifying. The date you see on Case.net is the court's own scheduling, not a hearing you attend. Only contested cases go to court. Documents are due **three days before** that date.

The judge reviews and signs

Typically 10–14 days from submission. Once the judge signs, you are divorced and the terms of your agreement become a court order.

If talks break down

The case simply moves to the contested docket. It is assigned to a trial judge and a case management conference is scheduled.

You can settle at any point along either path

Before we file, at the case management conference, at mediation, the week of trial, the morning of trial — even in the middle of trial. Most cases settle, and a case settles on better terms when the other side knows we are prepared to try it.

AFTER THE DECREE

If the judgment later stops fitting, the three usual answers are a **modification**, a **relocation** case, or **enforcement**. They are different tools — ask me which one fits.

HOW TO REACH ME

Email — anything substantive, and all documents, photographs and screenshots.

Text — scheduling and logistics.

Call — anything urgent, or a child's safety.

Not yet — Contested

Typically 6–18 months

Case management conference

Usually 30–90 days after filing. A brief meeting with the judge or commissioner: a trial date is set, a mediator is chosen, deadlines are set for closing discovery, and the court decides whether a guardian ad litem is needed. Seven days beforehand I file a case management conference statement — a two- to three-page outline of the issues, so the judge comes to the conference already familiar with your case.

Discovery

Jackson County requires the parties to exchange **standard discovery within 60 days**: income and expenses, assets and debts, mandatory interrogatories, and requests for production reaching three years back — six pay stubs, tax returns, W-2s and the like.

IF NEEDED These are for sharply contested cases, not a matter of course. Either side may serve requests for admission — asking the other to admit or deny specific facts, or that a document is genuine — and may take depositions, questioning a party under oath with a court reporter. Serving written discovery beyond the standard set takes the court's permission.

Temporary orders IF NEEDED

If support or a parenting schedule cannot wait for the end of the case, we ask the court to put something in place now. Orders can also restrain either side from transferring or disposing of marital property without the court's permission, or provide emergency relief if a child's health or welfare is in danger.

Mediation

Required in every contested case — at least two hours with a court-approved mediator if the attorneys are not involved. You can instead choose attorney-assisted mediation, which typically runs three hours minimum. Usually done in separate rooms with the mediator carrying offers back and forth, so you do not have to sit across from your spouse.

Guardian ad litem IF TRIGGERED

When either party alleges abuse or neglect, the statute is triggered and the court appoints a lawyer to represent the children's interests.

Trial preparation and trial

First a pretrial conference with the judge on the issues still outstanding. Then preparing witnesses, your own testimony and exhibits. Trial is to the judge alone — no jury — and usually ends with each side submitting a proposed judgment. Some judges rule from the bench; others take it under advisement for several days.

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Timeframes on this page are typical, not promises — every case is different, and yours may move faster or slower. This page describes the general process for a Missouri dissolution filed in Jackson County and is not legal advice about your particular case. If something here does not match what is happening in your case, ask me.