

Family Law Glossary

Term	Definition
Alimony	Financial payments made to help support a spouse or former spouse during separation or following divorce. <i>Synonym(s): spousal support</i>
Arrearage	The amount of money that is past due for child or spousal support.
Child Support Guidelines	Guidelines established by statute or rule that set forth the manner in which child support must be calculated, generally based on the income of the parents and the needs of the children.
Custody	Having rights to your child. Custody can be either legal or physical: Legal Custody: the right to make important decisions about your child's welfare, including making decisions about the child's education, safety, extracurricular activities, medical treatment, and religious instruction. Physical Custody: the child lives with and is raised by you. <i>Synonym(s): "physical care"</i>
Decree	The court's written order or decision finalizing the divorce.
Default	Failing to answer a petition for divorce. Failing to file an answer or appear in court as required can result in the court awarding everything requested by the filing spouse.
Equitable Distribution	A division of property that is fair in view of all the circumstances. Note: "fair" and/or "equitable" do not necessarily mean "equal."
Marital Property	Generally, all property acquired during the marriage.
Mediation	A form of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) which resolves legal disputes without going to trial. Mediation uses a trained and impartial third party who brings the parties together to reach mutual agreement.
Non-Marital Property	Generally, property owned by either spouse prior to the marriage or acquired by them individually during the marriage, such as by gift or inheritance.
Petitioner	The person who initiates the dissolution of marriage proceeding.
"QDRO"	A Qualified Domestic Relations Order - An order issued by the court to divide retirement benefits.
Respondent	The person who answers a petition in a legal proceeding.
Stipulation	An agreement entered into by the divorcing spouses that settles the legal issues between them and is often incorporated in the court's final decree.
Visitation	The time that a noncustodial parent spends with his or her child(ren). <i>Synonym(s): parenting time</i>



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