

PETITION FOR STEP PARENT ADOPTION

INFORMATION ABOUT THIS PACKET

Before you choose to represent yourself in any action, it is strongly recommended that you seek the advice of an attorney.

The forms included in this packet are for those litigants who choose to represent themselves in court, pro se (without an attorney). The packet may or may not include all the forms you need for your particular situation. Additional forms may be available upon request from the Clerk of Court's office.

It is up to you, the pro se litigant, to determine which forms are appropriate for your situation and to fill the forms out completely and properly. It is also your decision whether or not to use these forms. If you have any questions concerning your legal rights and remedies, please contact an attorney.

The Clerk of Court's Office and the Family Law Pro Se Coordinator cannot give you legal advice. You are representing yourself and you alone are responsible for the correct completion and filing of forms.

For a complete list of forms that are available through the Clerk of Court's Office, please refer to the Family Law Forms, Commentary and Instructions Book. For other information, refer to the Florida Statutes and the Florida Family Law Rules of Procedure.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRO SE

ABOUT LEGAL PROCEEDINGS:

- A pro se litigant is a person who represents himself on a legal matter without the legal advice and representation of an attorney licensed to practice law.
- It is highly recommended that you consult with an attorney before deciding to represent yourself in court.
- The Pro Se Coordinator nor the Clerk are attorneys and cannot give you legal advice, represent you in court, tell you what to say, do or write, or tell you about your legal rights and remedies.
- The Pro Se Coordinator can give information and guidance on how the court systems works, what forms are available for your use, local procedures for filing your forms and getting a hearing date and agencies in the community that may be able to assist you.
- It is the pro se litigant's responsibility to file the appropriate pleadings with the Clerk of Court, properly serve the opposing party with a copy of all documents, and make sure that the other party is given sufficient notice of the hearing.
- There is no confidential relationship between Family Law Pro Se Staff and pro se litigants.

ABOUT THE COURT HEARING:

- Be prepared to tell the Court what specific issues are to be addressed. It is recommended that you write down all issues and concerns that you will need to know in court rather than rely on memory.
 - The parties are not allowed to speak to each other. All questions and objections must be directed to the Judge. Address the Judge as "Your Honor" and request permission to address the court before speaking. Do not talk while the Judge is talking.
 - Arrangements should be made in advance for the care of minor children. The court will not address family law issues while the minor child(ren) are present.
 - Be sure to dress appropriately. No shorts, flip flops, slippers, halter or low cut tops, tight or short skirts/dresses.
 - All parties must maintain the utmost respect for the Court and each other at all times.
 - The Court will not tolerate emotional outburst. If you disagree with the Judge's decision, refrain from yelling, cursing, or making rude, threatening or other inappropriate comments.
- CAUTION:** The Judge can hold you in contempt of court for inappropriate actions or words, and you could be find and/or incarcerated.

COURT ADMINISTRATION, FIRST JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF FLORIDA
SELF-HELP PACKET FOR PETITION TO FOR STEPPARENT ADOPTION

YOU MAY CONSULT OR RETAIN AN ATTORNEY AT ANY TIME

These instructions are for a stepparent who is adopting his/her spouse's biological child. It should be filed in the county where the child resides. Both the stepparent and his/her spouse must sign the petition. Please read the instruction sheet on **General Information for Self-Represented Litigants along with this instruction sheet before proceeding.**

There are fees for this action. If you cannot pay the fees because of unemployment or insufficient income, you may file an Affidavit of Indigency, Form 12.902(a), Financial Affidavit, Form 12.902(b) and three months proof of income with the Clerk of Court. If the Clerk of Court determines that you meet the criteria, a Certified Certificate of Indigency will be provided to you and some fees may be waived.

Definitions

Petitioner: Parent who is married to the biological parent of the child to be adopted, and who files the petition to being the action.

Respondent: The non-custodial birth parent who is being asked to give up his/her parental rights pending a stepparent adoption and whose consent should be obtained.

You must complete and file documents 1-8 with the Clerk of Court, then proceed according to your particular situation as indicated in either A,B, or C below. Additional forms you may need that are not in your packet are available from the Clerk of Court.

1. _____ Form 12.981(b)(1) Join Petition for Adoption by Stepparent.
2. _____ Form 12.902(d) Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act (UCCJEA) Affidavit.
3. _____ Certified copy of the child(ren)'s birth certificate(s).
4. _____ Form 12.981(a)(5) Indian Child Welfare Act Affidavit.
5. _____ Form 12.981(a)(2) Consent of Adoptee is child is age 12 or older.
6. _____ Form 12.981(a)(1) Consent and waiver by Parent. This form must be completed and signed by the parent who is giving up rights to and custody of the minor child. This consent cannot be signed before the birth of the child.

OR

- a. _____ Form 12.981(a)(3) Affidavit of Non-Paternity. This form is to be completed when the father of the child was not married to the mother and paternity has not been established by court order. This consent can be signed before the birth of the child.

OR

- b. _____ Certified copy of respondent's death certificate, if deceased.

OR

- c. _____ Form 12.981(a)(4) Affidavit of Diligent Search. If you do not know where the parent is, you must make a serious effort to locate him/her through the diligent search process so that you can serve him/her with the Petition for Stepparent Adoption.
7. _____ Certificate of Search of the Florida Putative Father Registry. This search is required in every adoption proceeding. If the search results reveal who and where the father is, you must then serve him with the Summons and Petition for Adoption by Stepparent. To get this search done, you must first file form 12.981(a)(6) Motion for Search of Putative Father Registry asking the Judge to order the search along with the typed Form 12.981(a)(7) Order Granting Motion for Search of Putative Registry – for the Judge’s signature. Provide these two forms along with a self-addressed stamped envelope to the Clerk of Court. You will need to take a certified copy of the order and complete an Application for Search of the Putative Father Registry with the Department of Vital Statistics. They will perform the search and provide the Certificate of Search to you.
8. _____ If anyone other than a lawyer helps you to complete any of the forms, you must file Form 12.900(a) Disclosure from Non-Lawyer.
9. _____ Form 12.981(b)(2) Final Judgment of Stepparent Adoption. A sample is provided in the packet. The Final Judgment must be typed neatly, accurately and be in good condition for the Judge to sign. Complete and hold for further instructions.

A. IF YOU HAVE ALL DOCUMENTS AND REQUIRED CONSENTS:

1. _____ Once all documents, including consents, are filed with the Clerk of Court, file a Request for Hearing form with the Family Law Office to request a hearing.
2. _____ File the Notice of Hearing along with your Final Judgment and two self-addressed stamped envelopes with the Clerk of Court. Provide copies of the Notice to the other parent.

B. IF YOU DID NOT OBTAIN A CONSENT OR AFFIDAVIT OF NON PATERNITY FROM THE OTHER PARENT AND YOU KNOW HIS/HER CURRENT OR LAST KNOWN ADDRESS:

1. _____ Form 12.910(a) Summons: Personal Service on an individual. Tell the Clerk of Court that you need a Summons to serve the other parent with the documents and attach forms 1-7 above including the blank Consent and Waiver by Parent and Affidavit for Non-Paternity to the Summons. The Summons informs the respondent that he/she will have 20 days to respond to your petition. Take the Summons and attachments to the Sheriff’s Office in the county where the party lives. The Sheriff’s Office will send a Return of Service to you and to the Clerk of Court, stating whether the respondent was or was not served.
2. _____ If the Respondent does not file an answer within the 20 days provided, you must file Form 12.922(a) Motion for Default. If the other parent is not in the military, you must also file Form 12.912(b) Non-military Affidavit at this time.
3. _____ Once a Default is entered you may request a hearing by filing a Request for Hearing form with the Family Law Office. You will need to immediately file a Notice of Hearing and send a copy to the other parent.
4. _____ Prior to your hearing, provide your Final Judgment and two (2) self-addressed stamped envelopes to the Clerk of Court.

C. IF YOU HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO FIND THE OTHER PARENT’S ADDRESS THROUGH DILIGENT SEARCH OR THE PUTATIVE FATHER REGISTRY:

If your attempts to locate and serve the other parent through the Sheriff’s Office have been unsuccessful, you must use constructive service (sometimes referred to as service by publication). The requirements for constructive service are complex, and you may want to seek advice from an attorney.

1. _____ File the Notice of Action for Adoption by Stepparent. You will need to file this Notice with the Clerk of Court. Do not fill in the response date until you are presenting it to the Clerk of Court. It is recommended that you insert a response date at least 35 days, but no more than 60 days from the day you present it to the Clerk for signing and filing. Get two (2) copies; one for your records and one for the publication. The Notice must be published immediately with a qualified local newspaper for four (4) consecutive weeks. If you cannot afford to pay to publish the Notice, you will need to file an Affidavit of Indigency, Form 12.902(a) and Financial Affidavit, Form 12.902(b) per paragraph 2 of the above instructions. If the clerk determines that you cannot afford these fees, they will post your Notice in a designated place for the required four week period.

If you are a person with a disability who needs any accommodation in order to participate in this proceeding you are entitled at no cost to you to the provision of certain assistance. Please contact: Court Administration ADA Liaison Santa Rosa County 6865 Caroline Street Milton FL 32570 Phone 850-623-3159 Fax 850-982-0602 ADA.SantaRosa@flcourts1.gov at least 7 days before your scheduled court appearance, or immediately upon receiving this notification if the time before the scheduled appearance is less than 7 days; if you are hearing or voice impaired, call 711.

1. _____ The respondent has until the date listed on the Notice of Action to file an answer. If he/she fails to answer your petition in the time allowed, you will need to file Form 12.922(a) Motion for Default and Form 12.912(b) Non-Military Affidavit.
2. _____ After the Clerk of Court enters the Default, you may request a hearing date by filing a Request for Hearing form. Once you have a hearing date, you will need to file a Notice of Hearing with the Clerk.
3. _____ Prior to your hearing, provide your Final Judgment and a self-addressed stamped envelope to the Clerk of Court.

NOTICE OF LIMITATION OF SERVICES PROVIDED

The list of forms and procedural information should be considered as a guideline and not legal advice. It is best to consult with your own attorney, especially if your case present significant issues regarding children, child support, alimony, retirement or pension benefits, assets or liabilities.

The personnel in the self-help program are not acting as your lawyer or providing legal advice to you. Self-help personnel are not acting on behalf of the Court or any Judge. The presiding Judge in your case may require amendment of a form or substitution of a different form other than any you may have obtained from the clerk’s office, the self-help office or a legal forms provider. The form(s) you file are only a request of the Court. The Judge is not required to grant the relief requested in a form. The personnel in the self-help program cannot tell you what your legal rights or remedies are, represent you in court or tell you how to testify in court. Self-help services are available to all persons who are or will be parties to a family case. The information you give to and receive from self-help personnel is not confidential and may be subject to disclosure at a later date. Nothing you may tell family court personnel is confidential. If another person involved in your case seeks assistance from this self-help program, that person will be given the same type of assistance you received.