

GLOSSARY OF TERMS FOR THE NON-LAWYER

Contempt of Court- not doing what the court ordered you to do when you have the ability to do it.

Custodial Parent- the parent with whom the child lives the majority of the time.

Custody- a legal decision by a court which establishes with whom the child or children will live; an allocation of parental rights and responsibilities.

Emancipation- independent status granted a child under the age of 18 who is married or has otherwise been determined to be independent of his or her parents.

Hearing Officer- An attorney who sits as a trier of fact in custody matters, conducts hearings that are recorded, then makes recommendations to the Court, which become orders if not appealed by the filing of exceptions.

Jurisdiction- Legal authority a court has over particular persons or certain types of cases in a defined geographical area and/or subject matter.

Mediation- the confidential process by which a neutral mediator assists the parties in attempting to reach a mutually acceptable agreement on issues arising in a custody action. Any agreement reached must be based upon the voluntary decisions of the parties, and not the decision of the mediator.

Modification- a change to an order of court; court orders may be changed after a hearing or by agreement of the parties, but must always have a Judge's signature.

Non-custodial parent- the parent who does not have primary custody of a child, but who is responsible for a share of the child's financial support.

Petition- a written request presented to the Court in the proper form and manner, asking the Court to do some specific action on a case.

Pro Se- An action by a party on his or her own behalf, without the assistance of a licensed attorney; it may involve filing papers with the Court or appearing at a conference or hearing.

Protection from Abuse ("PFA")- the name of the statute which assists victims of domestic violence in obtaining a protective order.

Respondent- the person who responds to a petition filed against him/her.