

Family Law Glossary

Common terms you may hear in a Florida family law case, arranged roughly in the order they tend to come up.

- **Petition:** The document that starts a family law case, stating what the filing party is asking the court to decide.
- **Petitioner / Respondent:** The petitioner is the party who files the case; the respondent is the party who must respond.
- **Service of process:** The formal, legally required delivery of the petition and summons to the other party.
- **Answer:** The respondent's written response admitting or denying the petition's allegations.
- **Counterpetition:** A request by the respondent for their own relief, usually filed with the answer.
- **Financial affidavit:** A sworn statement of your income, expenses, assets, and debts, required in cases involving financial issues.
- **Mandatory disclosure:** The set of financial documents each party must give the other automatically under Rule 12.285.
- **Case management conference:** A hearing where the judge organizes the case and sets deadlines.
- **Temporary relief:** Orders that govern timesharing, support, or use of property while the case is pending.
- **Discovery:** The formal process of exchanging information and evidence before trial.
- **Interrogatories:** Written questions one party sends the other to answer under oath.
- **Request for production:** A demand to produce documents or things for inspection.
- **Deposition:** Sworn, out-of-court testimony given in response to questions and recorded by a court reporter.
- **Guardian ad litem:** A person appointed to represent a child's best interests in certain cases.
- **Parenting plan:** A written plan governing timesharing and parental responsibility for minor children.
- **Timesharing:** The schedule setting out when a child is with each parent (formerly called custody or visitation).
- **Parental responsibility:** Decision-making authority for a child, often shared between both parents.
- **Equitable distribution:** The division of marital assets and debts, which Florida law presumes should be roughly equal.
- **Alimony:** Spousal support that one party may be ordered to pay the other.

- **Child support:** Court-ordered payments for the support of a child, calculated under Florida's guidelines.
- **Mediation:** A confidential settlement process led by a neutral mediator, required in most cases before trial.
- **Pretrial conference:** A hearing shortly before trial to finalize issues, witnesses, and exhibits.
- **Trial:** The final hearing where a judge, not a jury, decides contested issues based on the evidence.
- **Final judgment:** The court's written decision that resolves the case.
- **Modification:** A later change to a judgment, such as support or timesharing, based on a substantial change in circumstances.
- **Contempt / enforcement:** Court action to compel a party to comply with an existing order.

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