

Family-Matters Terms in Plain English

Use this short guide when the official words themselves are making it harder to find the right help door.

What some common terms usually mean

- **Guardian ad Litem (GAL):** a court-appointed person who is supposed to look into the child's situation and report back to the court.
- **Family Law Magistrate:** a judicial officer who handles many family-law matters, especially procedure-heavy issues.
- **Interim hearing or temporary order:** short-term process or short-term order before the case is finally resolved.
- **Parenting plan:** the written structure for time, exchanges, and decision-making for the child.
- **Protection from Abuse (PFA):** a civil safety process meant for protection, not a normal custody disagreement.

A few more terms that trip people up

- **Service:** the official delivery of court papers in the way the rules require.
- **Docket or case number:** the record and identifier that help a clerk or office locate the matter quickly.
- **Motion:** a formal request asking the court to do something.
- **Order or judgment:** the written direction or ruling from the court - keep copies when you can.
- **Child-support review or modification:** a request to look at support again because circumstances or the official review process call for it.

Public information only - not legal advice.