

# YORK COUNTY CUSTODY FORMS AND INSTRUCTIONS

THESE FORMS AND INSTRUCTIONS WERE  
ORIGINALLY DRAFTED BY MID-PENN LEGAL  
SERVICES FOR USE BY THEIR CLIENTS.

YORK COUNTY GRATEFULLY  
ACKNOWLEDGES THE INVALUABLE  
GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT PROVIDED BY  
MID-PENN LEGAL SERVICES IN PERMITTING  
YORK COUNTY TO UTILIZE THEIR ORIGINAL  
FORMS IN THE PREPARATION AND  
INSTITUTION OF THESE CUSTODY FORMS  
AND INSTRUCTIONS. MOREOVER, YORK  
COUNTY GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES  
FRANKLIN AND FULTON COUNTIES FOR  
PERMITTING YORK COUNTY TO UTILIZE  
THEIR CUSTODY FORMS AND INSTRUCTIONS  
AS NEEDED.

## **DISCLAIMER**

NO PERSON IN THE COURT SELF-HELP CENTER, COURT ADMINISTRATION, THE PROTHONOTARY'S OFFICE, OR IN ANY COURT OFFICE IS PERMITTED TO PROVIDE YOU WITH LEGAL ADVICE. THE INFORMATION IN THE PACKETS IS NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR PROFESSIONAL LEGAL ADVICE. THE COURT ASSUMES NO RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCEPTS NO LIABILITY FOR ACTIONS TAKEN BY USERS OF THESE DOCUMENTS, INCLUDING RELIANCE ON THEIR CONTENTS.

**IT IS STRONGLY RECOMMENDED THAT YOU CONSULT WITH AN ATTORNEY. THE YORK COUNTY ATTORNEY CONNECTIONS PROGRAM WILL REFER YOU TO A FAMILY LAW ATTORNEY WHO WILL MEET WITH YOU FOR THIRTY MINUTES TO REVIEW YOUR RIGHTS AT A REDUCED FEE. YOU CAN CONTACT ATTORNEY CONNECTIONS AT (717) 854-8755.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **IMPORTANT NOTICES**

Proper use of these forms will enable you to start a custody action to obtain a custody order; start an action to modify an already existing custody order; start an action to request permission to relocate with the child or children; or start an action to find the other party in contempt of an already existing custody order. The best interest and permanent well-being of your children will certainly be affected by the outcome of any custody proceeding.

### **ACCORDINGLY, BEFORE PROCEEDING FURTHER WITH THESE FORMS IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU CAREFULLY READ, UNDERSTAND, AND CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:**

→If you decide to represent yourself (known as “pro se”) in a custody action, it may take a lot of time, and cause you difficulty, confusion, and frustration. You will not be given any leeway because you are not an attorney. You will be held to the same standard as an attorney. You must follow the Rules and Procedures of York County and of Pennsylvania.

→This packet is not a substitute for professional legal advice about your specific situation. Speaking with an attorney is highly recommended especially if you plan to raise issues of abuse, neglect, unfitness, mental illness, psychological problems, criminal convictions, criminal charges and/or any other complex issues.

→No person in the Court Self-Help Center, Court Administration, the Prothonotary’s Office, or any other court office is permitted to help you fill out these forms or to help you decide which set of forms to use.

**Before proceeding further, carefully read and review the following important custody definitions and important custody issues.**

# File Custody Complaint or Modification

## Conciliation Conference

Agreement Not Reached

Interim Order for Custody

Kids First Custody Workshop

Mediation

Agreement Not Reached

File Parenting Plan & Pre-Trial Memo

Pre-Trial Conference

Trial

Custody Order

Agreement Reached

Stipulated Order for Custody

## **IMPORTANT CUSTODY DEFINITIONS**

Abuse: The occurrence of one or more of the following acts between family or household members, sexual or intimate partners, or persons who share biological parenthood:

- (1) Attempting to cause or intentionally, knowingly or recklessly causing bodily injury, serious bodily injury, rape, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, sexual assault, statutory sexual assault, aggravated indecent assault, indecent assault or incest with or without a deadly weapon.
- (2) Placing another in reasonable fear of imminent serious bodily injury.
- (3) The infliction of false imprisonment pursuant to 18 Pa.C.S. §2903 (relating to false imprisonment).
- (4) Physically or sexually abusing minor children, including such terms as defined in Chapter 63 (relating to child protective services).
- (5) Knowingly engaging in a course of conduct or repeatedly committing acts toward another person, including following the person, without proper authority, under circumstances which place the person in reasonable fear of bodily injury.

Adult: An individual 18 years of age or older.

Agency: Any organization, society, institution, court facility or other entity, which provides for the care of a child. The term does not include a county children and youth social service agency.

Child: An un-emancipated person under 18 years of age.

Conciliation Conference: A process in which a neutral person meets with the parties to try to resolve / settle the dispute in an agreeable manner.

Custody order: The written document, signed by a judge, stating where a child will live and how decisions will be made.

Defendant: A person sued in a civil proceeding or accused in a criminal proceeding.

Legal custody: The right to make major decisions on behalf of the child, including, but not limited to, medical, religious and educational decisions.

Memorandum: A party's written statement of its legal arguments presented to the court.

Modify: To change.

Parental duties: Includes meeting the physical, emotional and social needs of the child.

Partial physical custody: The right to assume physical custody of the child for less than a majority of the time.

Party: Anyone taking part in a lawsuit as a plaintiff or a defendant.

Petition for Contempt: A legal paper filed in court by one party when the other party has violated a custody order. The Petition describes the contempt (violation).

Physical custody: The actual physical possession and control of a child.

Plaintiff: The party who brings (starts) a civil suit in a court of law.

Primary physical custody: The right to assume physical custody of the child for the majority of time.

Pro-Se: A Latin term meaning “for one’s self.” It also means “without an attorney”

Relocation: A change in a residence of the child that significantly impairs the ability of a non-relocating party to exercise custodial rights. An inter-county move may constitute a relocation if it materially affects some aspect of the child’s life.

Service: Delivery of court papers to a party in accordance with local rules of court.

Shared legal custody: The right of more than one individual to participate in making major decision on behalf of the child.

Shared physical custody: The right of more than one individual to assume physical custody of the child, each having significant periods of physical custodial time with the child.

Sole legal custody: The right of one individual to exclusive legal custody of the child.

Sole physical custody: The right of one individual to exclusive physical custody of the child.

Supervised physical custody: Custodial time during which an agency or an adult designated by the court or agreed upon by the parties monitors the interaction between the child and the individual with those rights.

### **IMPORTANT ISSUES IN CUSTODY.**

**“Standing”**. Not everyone is entitled to start an action for custody. Persons entitled by law to start an action for custody have “standing” to bring the action. Parents of the child have standing since the law entitles them to bring an action for custody of their child. Other persons, such as grandparents, may have standing in certain circumstances. (See 23 Pa.C.S. §§5324 and 5325) These forms have been prepared

for use by parents. **Other persons desiring to start a custody action are strongly encouraged to seek the assistance of an attorney to ascertain if they have standing.**

Parties living separate and apart in the same residence with the child may start a custody action but the custody order entered as a result will not be effective until the parties no longer reside in the same residence.

**Types of Custody Awards.** After considering the relevant factors (discussed below), the court may award any of the following types of custody it is in the best interest of the child:

1. Shared physical custody.
2. Primary physical custody.
3. Partial physical custody.
4. Sole physical custody.
5. Supervised physical custody.
6. Shared legal custody.
7. Sole legal custody.

### **FACTORS CONSIDERED FOR CUSTODY**

In Pennsylvania, neither the mother nor the father of a child will be the preferred custodian in a custody action simply because of gender. However, in a custody action between a parent and a non-parent, the parent will be the preferred custodian.

In ordering any form of custody, the court is required to determine the best interest of the child by considering all relevant factors, especially those that affect the safety of the child, including the following factors:

1. Which party is more likely to encourage and permit frequent and continuing contact between the child and another party.
2. The present and past abuse committed by a party or member of the party's household, whether there is a continued risk of harm to the child or an abused party and which party can better provide adequate physical safeguards and supervision of the child.
3. The parental duties performed by each party on behalf of the child.
4. The need for stability and continuity in the child's education, family life and community life.
5. The availability of extended family.
6. The child's sibling relationships.
7. The well-reasoned preference of the child, based on the child's maturity and judgment.
8. The attempts of a parent to turn the child against the other parent, except in cases of domestic violence where reasonable safety measures are necessary to protect the child from harm.
9. Which party is more likely to maintain a loving, stable, consistent and nurturing relationship with the child adequate for the child's emotional needs.

10. Which party is more likely to attend to the daily physical, emotional, developmental, educational and special needs of the child.
11. The proximity of the residences of the parties.
12. Each party's availability to care for the child or ability to make appropriate child-care arrangements.
13. The level of conflict between the parties and the willingness and ability of the parties to cooperate with one another. A party's effort to protect a child from abuse by another party is not evidence of unwillingness or inability to cooperate with that party.
14. The history of drug or alcohol abuse of a party or member of a party's household.
15. The mental and physical condition of a party or member of a party's household.
16. Any other relevant factor.

### **CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS AND/OR CRIMINAL CHARGES**

According to 23 Pa.C.S. §§5329 and 5330, the Court (either the Conciliator or the Judge) is required to consider certain criminal offenses for which either party or a member of a party's household has been convicted or for which either party has been charged before the court can make a determination or order of custody.

### **CONSIDERATION OF CRIMINAL CONVICTION.**

**Offenses.** Where a party seeks any form of custody, the court is required to consider whether that party or member of that party's household has been convicted of or has pleaded guilty or no contest to any of the offenses listed below or an offense in another U.S. State or another country substantially equivalent to any of the listed offenses. The court must consider such conduct and determine that the party does not pose a threat of harm to the child before making any order of custody to that parent when considering the following offenses:

- (1) 18 Pa.C.S. Ch. 25 (relating to criminal homicide).
- (2) 18 Pa.C.S. §2702 (relating to aggravated assault).
- (3) 18 Pa.C.S. §2706 (relating to terroristic threats).
- (4) 18 Pa.C.S. §2709.1 (relating to stalking).
- (5) 18 Pa.C.S. § 2901 (relating to kidnapping).
- (6) 18 Pa.C.S. § 2902 (relating to unlawful restraint).
- (7) 18 Pa.C.S. § 2903 (relating to false imprisonment).
- (8) 18 Pa.C.S. § 2910 (relating to luring a child into a motor vehicle or structure).
- (9) 18 Pa.C.S. §3121 (relating to rape).
- (10) 18 Pa.C.S. §3122.1 (relating to statutory sexual assault).
- (11) 18 Pa.C.S. §3123 (relating to involuntary deviate sexual intercourse).
- (12) 18 Pa.C.S. §3124.1 (relating to sexual assault).
- (13) 18 Pa.C.S. §3125 (relating to aggravated indecent assault).
- (14) 18 Pa.C.S. §3126 (relating to indecent assault).
- (15) 18 Pa.C.S. §3127 (relating to indecent exposure).
- (16) 18 Pa.C.S. §3129 (relating to sexual intercourse with an animal).

- (17) 18 Pa.C.S. §3130 (relating to conduct relating to sex offenders).
- (18) 18 Pa.C.S. §3301 (relating to arson and related offenses).
- (19) 18 Pa.C.S. §4302 (relating to incest).
- (20) 18 Pa.C.S. §4303 (relating to concealing death of child).
- (21) 18 Pa.C.S. §4304 (relating to endangering welfare of children).
- (22) 18 Pa.C.S. §4305 (relating to dealing in infant children).
- (23) 18 Pa.C.S. §5902(b) (relating to prostitution and related offenses).
- (24) 18 Pa.C.S. §5903(c) or (d) (relating to obscene and other sexual materials and performances).
- (25) 18 Pa.C.S. §6301 (relating to corruption of minors).
- (26) 18 Pa.C.S. §6312 (relating to sexual abuse of children).
- (27) 18 Pa.C.S. §6318 (relating to unlawful contact with minor).
- (28) 18 Pa.C.S. §6320 (relating to sexual exploitation of children).
- (29) Section 6114 (relating to contempt for violation of order or agreement).
- (30) The former 75 Pa.C.S. §3731 (relating to driving under the influence of alcohol or controlled substance).
- (31) 75 Pa.C.S. Ch.38 (relating to driving after imbibing alcohol or utilizing drugs).
- (32) Section 13 (a)(1) of the act of April 14, 1972 (P.L.233, No.64), known as The Controlled Substance, Drug, Device and Cosmetic Act, to the extent that it prohibits the manufacture, sale or delivery, holding, offering for sale or possession of any controlled substance or other drug or device.

**Parent Convicted of Murder.** The court cannot award custody, partial custody or supervised physical custody to a parent who has been convicted of murder under 18 Pa.C.S. §2502(a) (relating to murder) of the other parent of the child **unless** the child is of suitable age and consents to the order.

**Evaluation and Counseling.** At the initial in-person contact with the court, the judge, conference officer or other appointed individual (like a conciliator) shall perform an initial evaluation to determine whether the party or household member who committed the one of the above offenses poses a threat to the child and whether counseling is necessary. The initial evaluation shall not be conducted by a mental health professional. After the initial evaluation, the court may order further evaluation or counseling by a mental health professional if the court determines it is necessary. **The court may, and most likely will, order a party to pay all or part of the costs of the counseling and evaluations.** If you, or a household member have one of the enumerated offenses, it is highly recommended that you obtain an evaluation from a court approved resource and attach a copy to your conciliation memorandum and bring the original to the conciliation conference.

### **CONSIDERATION OF CRIMINAL CHARGE.**

When a party finds out that the other party has been charged with one of the offenses listed above, the non-offending party may move for a temporary custody order or modification of an existing custody order and the court shall hold the hearing as soon as possible to determine if the offending party poses a risk to the child.

**THESE FORMS DO NOT SPECIFICALLY ADDRESS THE SITUATION WHERE A PARTY OR A PARTY'S HOUSEHOLD MEMBER HAS BEEN CONVICTED, PLEADED GUILTY OR NO CONTEST TO ONE OF THE ABOVE OFFENSES. ACCORDINGLY, IF CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS OR CHARGES ARE INVOLVED IN YOUR CASE, YOU SHOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO REPRESENT YOURSELF BUT RATHER YOU SHOULD SEEK THE REPRESENTATION OF AN ATTORNEY.**

**AFTER READING THIS INTRODUCTION, IF YOU STILL WANT TO START A CUSTODY ACTION WITHOUT THE ASSISTANCE OF AN ATTORNEY, THEN GO TO "PACKET A" FOR INSTRUCTIONS AND FORMS RELATING TO STARTING A CUSTODY ACTION TO OBTAIN A CUSTODY ORDER; GO TO "PACKET B" FOR INSTRUCTIONS AND FORMS RELATING TO STARTING AN ACTION TO MODIFY AN ALREADY EXISTING CUSTODY ORDER; GO TO "PACKET C" FOR INSTRUCTIONS AND FORMS RELATING TO STARTING AN ACTION TO REQUEST PERMISSION TO RELOCATE WITH THE CHILD OR CHILDREN; OR GO TO "PACKET D" FOR INSTRUCTIONS AND FORMS RELATING TO STARTING AN ACTION TO FIND THE OTHER PARTY IN CONTEMPT OF AN ALREADY EXISTING CUSTODY ORDER.**