

“What the mind doesn’t understand, it worships or fears.”

-Margaret Walker

Again, all cases are different. The people and issues will vary depending on the particulars of your case. Below, you will find a listing of the most common people, events, written communications, and general terms you will potentially hear.

(Potential) People in Your Case		
Role	Legal Lens	Party Lens
Petitioner	The party who initiates the case	The person who started this. The case will take place in the court where they file it.
Respondent	The party who does not initiate the case	The person dragged into it
Court Appointed Advisor (CAA)	A social worker or counselor who is appointed to review a broad spectrum of facts and evidence in a case, outside of due process, to make recommendations to a judge about appropriate next steps in the best interest of a child (e.g. a psychological evaluation, substance abuse testing, etc.)	They will be with you for your entire case...so you need to communicate appropriately and periodically with them to make sure they have all the facts.
Expert Witness	An subject-matter expert in a field who can testify to facts in a case	You have to pay for this! Think \$500/hour.
Forensic Evaluator	A psychologist or counselor who is trained in how to engage in court proceedings.	You have to pay for this too! For interview, reading, research, and testimony time. Think \$5-10K.
Therapeutic Interventionist (TI)	A mental health professional who supervises court-mandated treatment plans to ensure they are followed to normalize parenting time	Again, get out your wallet.
Vocational Evaluator	A professional who can be used to determine the earning capacity of a party when they are not working or are working below their capacity	Wallet time!

Parenting Coordinator	A professional who monitors and coordinates communication between parents in high-conflict cases	Also costs money.
Parenting Supervisor	Someone who supervises a parent who presents safety issues to the child during parenting time.	There is ZERO training required for this. Can be a free relative or a paid service. Either way, no training is required and there is no oversight.
Reunification Therapist	A mental health professional who works with a parent and child to repair a damaged relationship	Wallet.
Guardian ad Litem (GAL)	An attorney appointed to represent the child in a case when there are concerns about child endangerment...often when there might be a dependency action..	
Judge	The person hearing a case and making decisions	The decider
Judicial Assistant (JA)	The assistant to the judge who manages the paperwork, court calendar, and day-to-day details	The writer for the decider. Decisions are only as good as this person's writing.
Clerk	The records manager for cases; each judge has at least one designated clerk.	Manages a judge's courtroom

Types of Court Events		
Role	Legal Lens	Party Lens
Status Conference	This is an informal 'check in' on the case with all parties present. Usually very short and does not allow evidence or witnesses to be introduced.	Don't get excited about this. This is the love child of bad meetings and adult babysitting. The judge checks in to see if everyone is doing the things they said they would do to move the case forward. Typically quick - 15 minutes to an hour.

Resolution Management Conference RMC)	An informal conference designed to define the issues and create a plan and schedule to resolve the case from start to trial.	
Emergency Hearing	A party can request this if they believe an emergency exists...but the bar is BEYOND HIGH to get one.	Big damn deal! You can introduce new evidence for the judge to consider. This is a big fail of the court's current structure. Dockets are too packed to accommodate. Fun fact: If you're lucky enough to get one, some random judge, with little to no knowledge of your case's complexities, will hear it in your case.
Hearing	A bit more formal and consequential than a conference, evidence and witnesses may be introduced and presented. Decisions are made about specific, limited motions pending.	Big damn deal! This is where judges make and order decisions. And you can have the judge look at new evidence. They are typically longer - 1 hour to a day.
Contempt Hearing	A hearing to determine if a party has willfully and knowingly not complying with a court order.	The other party is accusing you of not following court orders. They have to prove you deliberately and knowingly defied a clear order. Not even sure what the consequences are here.
Trial	The most formal and consequential. Evidence and witnesses can be introduced and presented. Big decisions are made here about the case in its entirety.	Big damn deal! Never as long as they should be. Criminal trials last as long as it takes to present everything; family law is timed like a quickfire challenge on a cooking show.
Deposition	When one party asks another party questions under oath, on the record, outside of the courtroom.	
Mediation	A process in which a neutral, professional third-party assists parties in dispute to reach a compromise and resolve it.	
Vacate	To cancel something	FTLOG, just say canceled already

Types of Written Communications		
Role	Legal Lens	Party Lens
Discovery	This is a written request by a party for the other party to provide information. It will come with interrogatories (uniform and/or non-uniform) to ask for specific, common things. Interrogatories (open-ended) Request of Admission (yes/nos statement)	I'm asking you to show me something.
Disclosure	This is written information provided by a party in response to a discovery request. Interrogatories may or may not be addressed in whole or part.	You're showing me what I asked to see. Ugh - did they both have to start with a 'D'?!? I never get them right.
Correspondences	All written communications with others (emails, texts, letters, social media posts, videos, audio files).	Anything put in writing, video, or audio that can be reviewed
Motion	This is any written 'ask' filed with the court by either party.	The ask.
Response	This is the opposing party's written response to a motion.	The response to the ask.
Reply	If a response is filed to a motion, the motioning party may file a written reply to it. Replies can be filed to replies.	The asker's response to the response. Also, why do they both start with an "R"? Just to fuck with us, right?
Stipulation	A party's agreement to a request by the other party	An agreement
Orders Emergency, Temporary, Final	A judge's written decision about a motion.	
Motion for Clarification	A party's request to resolve a discrepancy between a judge's order and the law or provide additional information that	The fact that this is a well-known thing tells you how frequently the minutes provide the real-world details families

	should have, but was not, included. Through reassessing evidence	need.
Motion for Reconsideration	A party's request that a judge reconsider a decision through reassessing evidence.	What you file when a judge gets it wrong.
Motion to Alter or Amend (Rule 83)	A party requests the court to alter a judgment AND stay the time so the appeal countdown doesn't begin. Has to be filed within 25 days of ruling.	
Motion for Relief from Judgment (Rule 85)	A party requests the court to change Has to be filed within 6 months of a ruling and can include newly-uncovered evidence.	
Minutes	A judge's written summary containing decisions made in a hearing or conference	The court says...
Exhibits	Evidence presented in a hearing or trial	Documents to prove your case. The labeling system for this IS CRAZY and will make you want to tear your hair out when you're reviewing documents before trial. Breathe.
Pre-Trial Statement	A written argument that is submitted in advance of a hearing that outlines & evidences a party's argument	Expensive and time consuming!
Special Action	An appeal about a very narrow aspect of a case while the case is still pending.	
Appeal	Asking a higher court to overturn a decision of a lower court.	
OTA	Orders issued to the parties in a case to appear	
Subpoena	Court orders requiring recipients (who are not parties in the case) to either provide documents or appear for testimony.	

Other Key Terms		
Role	Legal Lens	Party Lens
Forensic	Just means someone trained in court procedures so they can write reports and testify	The court told this person how to write reports and testify. That's it. Worthless when considering someone's credentials for what they can actually DO.
Alienation	An accusation that one parent has deliberately and maliciously tried to damage the relationship between the other parent and the child.	Note: not based in science nor recognized in the DSM-V. Also, typically, an accusation made by an abuser.
Safe Harbor/Haven	This provides privacy to a party regarding documentation from counseling sessions.	Prevents a party from being able to use therapy records for legal purposes. If you're in a case with an abusive personality, you and your kids should get this automatically. But you won't. You have to ask for it.
Child Support Calculator	The computation the state uses to determine what amount of support, if any, is required of one parent to the other	OMG. The 2022 Arizona manual for this is 58 pages long. Can someone please fix this so it makes sense?
Domestic Violence	Use of economic, physical, sexual, emotional, technological, financial, legal, isolation, threats, intimidation, privilege, and minimization/blaming to harm and control another person.	The court seems to focus, exclusively, on only physical and sexual abuse...but they are all harmful for both adults and children of domestic relationships...and deserve consideration.
High-conflict	This is a typical case label for cases in which parents are perceived as being difficult.	Sometimes, people are assholes. However, it often refers to cases in which there are serious safety issues that require scrutiny and attention.
Sealed vs. Confidential	Confidential means that parties in the case can see materials, but the public cannot; Sealed means that	If you have something to hide, this is your move.

	neither parties in the case nor the public can see materials.	
Custody	This is not a thing. Instead, judges make decisions about two things: decision making and parenting time.	The court likes to (no loves to) default to 50/50. It may be easy, but it is not in the best interest of families with high-risk circumstances AND it is not supported by the law. If those are your realities, you will have to fight HARD for what you and your family need.
Paternity	Establishing the biological parents of a minor child OR recognizing the signator of a birth certificate as a parent.	Baby daddy
ARS	This just refers to the written law in Arizona: Arizona Revised Statutes. ARS is always followed by a number that helps you look up that specific piece of the law.	It's the written law. Often unfair or lacking respect for common sense and current research. But it's the law.
FTR	For the Record. This is what they call the recording of every hearing, conference, and trial. It's a digital recording.	If you want to use it in court, you need to pay a court transcriptionist to create a written record of it.
Amendment	When the court's minutes contain an error, an amendment needs to be requested and provided.	'the court fixing its fuckups'.
Collaborative or Modern Divorce	This is a relatively new strategy that seeks to use a team of professional counselors, lawyers, and mediators to manage a case quickly and affordably.	I'm so jealous of this. You people with uncontested matters...you high-functioning, emotionally well-adjusted adults have it SO SO good.
Affidavit of Financial Information (AFI)	A financial snapshot of a party's monthly income and expenses with accompanying tax returns (3 past years) and paystubs (last 4 pay periods).	Show me the money!

For you overachievers who want to know ALL of the terms, more can be found, specific to Arizona, here. Warning: civil and criminal terms are not separated...so many will not apply to family law court (which is part of civil court).

<https://www.azcourts.gov/domesticviolencelaw/Glossary>