

1. Fill out your petition and make two copies after it is completed. When filing, the Court Clerk will keep the original, then file stamp and return the two copies to you. One copy should be kept with you, the other should be sent to the opposing party. When you take the petition to the courthouse, you should also take the documents regarding service.
2. Serving the opposing party.
  - a. If you know where the opposing party is, fill out Form 03 – Summons and Return. You will have to file this with the petition, and then take a copy of the petition, summons, and return that have been stamped by the Court Clerk to the Sheriff's office in the county where the opposing party lives. After the opposing party has been served he or she will have twenty days (starting from the day after they received the petition) to file an answer. If the opposing party lives out of state, they will have thirty days to file an answer.
  - b. If you know where the opposing party is, but you were unable to have them served and they live out of state, you can use Form 04 – Affidavit to Allow Service by Registered or Certified Mail. Once the Court Clerk stamps the original and copies of this form, take a copy of this and the petition and mail it to the opposing party. The opposing party will have 30 days after the day they sign for the letter to file an answer.
  - c. If you do not know where the opposing party is, fill out forms 05 Affidavit to Allow Service by Publication, 06 Notice of Publication, and 07 Affidavit Following Service by Publication.
    - i. Take the original and two copies of forms 05 and 06 to the courthouse with the petitions.
    - ii. Once the Court Clerk has stamped the copies, take a copy of form 06 to your local newspaper. You will have to pay for the notice to run in the newspaper once a week for four consecutive weeks. After the notice has run for the last time, the opposing party will have thirty days to file an answer to the petition.
    - iii. After the thirty days have passed, take the original and two copies of Form 07 Affidavit following Service by Publication to the Court Clerk.
3. If the opposing party does not want to contest the adoption, they should fill out and file Form 02 Consent to Adoption.
4. If the opposing party does not respond to Service by Publication, you should fill out either form 07 Affidavit of Good Standing – Father or Form 08 Affidavit of Good Standing – Mother, and file it with the Court Clerk. In this form you should state the reason for the adoption.
5. If the opposing party does not respond to the Service by Sheriff, Registered Mail, or Publication, you should fill out and file Form 10 Application for Entry of Default & Entry of Default and Form 11 Affidavit in Support of Default.
6. If the opposing party files an answer and disputes the adoption, you should retain the services of an attorney to assist you.
7. After the parties have been served and answered or defaulted, fill out and file Form 13, Request and Order for Setting. This is the request for the hearing on the adoption. You should also fill out Form 14, Interlocutory Decree of Adoption and file it. If the judge agrees, he will sign this order.

8. After the Interlocutory Order is signed, you will have to wait 6 months for the Department of Family Services to perform their inspections to determine if the adoption is in the best interest of the child(ren).
9. After the 6 months have passed, you can fill out and file Form 15, Final Decree of Adoption.