

How to Serve Court Papers in a Domestic Relations Case

How do I serve court papers? When you start a new case or open a closed one, you have to let the person you filed against know about it. You do this by giving that person a **Service Packet**, which includes a copy of the papers you filed and other papers the clerk gives you. You must “serve” these papers on the other party by any or all of these options:

- (1) hand delivery
- (2) certified mail
- (3) text, email or social media

*If your case involves child support, you have to serve the other party in a different way. See how to do so in, “How to Serve Court Papers in a Child Support Case.”

Option 1 - Hand delivery. Have someone else give the **Service Packet** to the other party or leave it at the other party’s home with someone who lives there and is at least 16 years old.

- You **cannot** give the Service Packet to the other party yourself
- You must have it done by some other adult who is not a party in the case and is at least 18 years old (the “server”)
- If the other party won’t to take the Service Packet, the server can drop it on the ground
- The server must complete an [Affidavit of Service by Individual](#) form and file it with the court



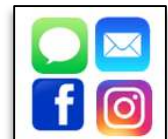
Option 2 - Certified or Registered Mail, Return Receipt Requested. Mail the **Service Packet** to the other party by Certified or Registered Mail, Return Receipt Requested. You can mail it yourself or have someone do it for you.

- Track the progress of your packet on the post office’s website at www.usps.com
- When you get the **green card** back, complete an [Affidavit of Service by Certified Mail](#) form, attach a copy of the green card, and file it with the court

A screenshot of a USPS Form 3813, Affidavit of Service by Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested. The form is divided into two main sections: 'SENDER - COMPLETE THIS SECTION' and 'COMPLETE THIS SECTION ONLY IF DELIVERED'. The 'SENDER' section includes instructions for completing the form and a list of items to be checked, such as 'Certified Mail', 'Registered Mail', and 'Return Receipt Requested'. The 'COMPLETE THIS SECTION ONLY IF DELIVERED' section includes a list of items to be checked, such as 'Delivered to Addressee', 'Delivered to Other Person', and 'Delivered to Office'. The form is dated 03/2013 and includes the text 'PS Form 3813, March 2013' and 'Domestic Return Receipt'.

Option 3 – Text Message, Email or Social Media. Send the **Service Packet** to the other party by text, email or social media. You can send it yourself or have someone do it for you.

- Print a screen shot of the message or email you sent
- Complete an [Affidavit of Service by Electronic Means](#) form, attach the screen shot, and file it with the court



What papers do I have to serve? The clerk will give you a **Service Packet** that has the following papers that you must serve on the other party:

- Complaint or Petition
- Summons
- Motion (if you filed one)
- Notice (if any)
- Other documents the court orders you to serve (if any)

When do I have to serve it by? You have **60 days** to serve the papers and file proof of service with the court.

- If you haven't served the other party by then, you can file a **Motion to Extend Time for Service** *before* the 60-day deadline. If you don't file it before the deadline, the court will dismiss your case. This means you will have to refile your case and start over.
- Even if you haven't served the other party before your hearing date, you should still go to the hearing. You can ask the court to give you more time to serve the other party. If you don't show up, the court will dismiss your case.

How do I file proof of service?

- Email it to the Central Intake Center at FamilyCourtCIC@dcsc.gov
- Bring or mail it to the Central Intake Center at DC Superior Court, 500 Indiana Avenue, NW, Room JM-540, Washington, DC 20001
- Upload it to the court's e-filing system at <https://www.fileandservexpress.com/dc>

What if I can't find the other party? You can file a motion asking to serve the papers some other way, such as by posting them on the court's website or publishing them in a newspaper.

What if the other party is a minor child or incompetent? You must serve a minor child or an incompetent person by hand delivery (option 1). If the child is under 16 years old, you must also serve the adult who lives with the child.

Get forms:

<https://www.dcbart.org/for-the-public/legal-resources/pro-se-pleadings.cfm>

Read Domestic Relations Rule 4:

<https://www.dccourts.gov/sites/default/files/rules-superior-court/>

Need help or more info? Call the Family Court Self-Help Center at 202-879-0096 or visit us at the Moultrie Courthouse, 500 Indiana Ave., NW, Room JM-570, Washington, DC 20001

<https://www.dccourts.gov/services/family-matters/self-help-center>