A FATHER'S FIELD GUIDE • OREGON • REAL CASE, REAL PAPER

DAD'S CUSTODY PLAYBOOK

What to file. When to file it. How to document every missed visit.
What to say in the hearing room - and what never to say.

From six years apart from my daughter to court-enforced video visits - Sun 9:00 AM / Wed 6:30 PM - and a fight I am still in.

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Father • Respondent, Jackson County Circuit Court
Case No. 22DR05472

$37

DIGITAL EDITION

Educational only. Not legal advice. Not a lawyer. See disclaimer inside before you rely on anything in this book.

READ THIS FIRST

Honest disclaimer

I am a dad, not a lawyer. This playbook is my story and my system - not legal advice for your case.

Custody law is state law, county practice, and judge-specific. What worked in Jackson County, Oregon, in front of my judge may be filed differently, heard differently, or decided differently where you live. Deadlines, forms, fees, mediation rules, and enforcement procedures change. Courts publish official packets for a reason: use them, and check every deadline against the current court record in your own case.

Nothing in this book creates an attorney-client relationship. Nothing here guarantees an outcome. If you can afford a lawyer, hire one. If you cannot, many courts offer family-law facilitators, self-help centers, legal-aid intake, and limited-scope consultations where a lawyer reviews your papers for a single fee. Use every one of those that exists in your county.

> **How to use this book safely:** Take the system - the log, the checklists, the discipline about words. Verify the procedure - the form name, the filing rule, the deadline - with your clerk, your court's official packet, or a licensed attorney in your state before you file.

What this book will do

It will show you the order I learned to do things in, the paper that actually moved my case, the mistakes that cost me time I will never get back, and the exact habits that turned "he said / she said" into a record a judge could act on. That is worth having on night one, when you do not know where to start and the internet is selling you anger.

What this book will not do

It will not bad-mouth your child's mother for you, coach you to perform for a judge, or teach you to win by labels. Labels lose. Documents win. If you came here for ammunition to hate somebody, close this now. Your child needs a father who is calm, documented, and present - in that order, every time.

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Templates included: Starter Document Checklist (p. 9), Filing Checklist (p. 9), Hearing-Day Checklist (p. 9), Visit Log Template (p. 14), Missed-Visit Capture Checklist (p. 15), Pattern Summary Table (p. 16), Mediation Prep Checklist (p. 18), Declaration Structure (pp. 21-22), Records-to-Request List (p. 26).

> **Print pages 9, 14, 15, and 18.** Keep them in a single folder - physical, not just on your phone. That folder is your case. Everything else in this book teaches you how to fill it.

Six years apart

I did not lose my daughter in one hearing. I lost her in slow pieces - and I got her back the same way: one filing, one log entry, one kept appointment at a time.

My daughter is Shastina. For about six years, I did not have her in my life the way a father should. There was a judgment in 2022 - Jackson County Circuit Court, Case No. 22DR05472 - and years of distance, conditions, and paper between me and my own child. I got off parole on May 18, 2026. Around June 2, 2026, I filed for visits. I was not filing to punish anybody. I was filing to be a dad again.

On July 6, 2026 - my birthday - I regained video visitation. After six years. If you have lived that kind of gap, you know there is no word for what that day feels like. A supplemental judgment followed on July 20, 2026, and a corrected supplemental judgment on July 30. On paper, I had parenting time again.

Paper is where it starts. It is not where it ends.

> *"A court order is a promise written down. Your job is to build the record that makes the court enforce its own promise."*

Visits were set over Zoom, in a room hosted by her mother. Sundays at 9:00 AM. Wednesdays at 6:30 PM. Simple. Specific. Enforceable - if I could prove what happened, visit by visit, in a form a judge could read in two minutes.

That "if" is this entire book.

The timeline that matters

Dates win arguments that feelings cannot. This is the spine of my case, the way I learned to tell it - short, dated, and tied to a document.

DATE	WHAT HAPPENED
July 14, 2022	General Judgment entered in Case No. 22DR05472 (default order the same day).
July 29, 2024	Modification hearing, both parties present. Modification denied Aug. 1, 2024.
May 18, 2026	I got off parole. A condition that had shaped the case was finished.
~June 2, 2026	I filed for visits.
July 6, 2026	Hearing - and my birthday. I regained video visitation after about six years apart.
July 20 / 30, 2026	Supplemental Judgment (parenting time), then Corrected Supplemental Judgment.
Sept. 2, 2026	I filed motions to modify (parenting time, relocation) and to enforce the parenting-time order. Order to Show Cause issued Sept. 4.
Sept. 17, 2026	Mediation marked failure to appear. Mediation was later rescheduled - Oct. 26, 2026, 11:00 AM.
Sept. 21, 2026	Enforcement hearing. The court enforced Sun 9:00 AM / Wed 6:30 PM visits and ordered the visit link to be sent.
Sept. 23 - Oct. 7	Three consecutive dead Wednesdays: Sept. 23, Sept. 30, Oct. 7. Each one captured and logged.
Oct. 14, 2026	First completed Wednesday since the Sept. 21 hearing. In my log, in my words: "Meeting was good."
Nov. 9, 2026	Modification and relocation hearing set - 9:00 AM, Room 201, Jackson County Circuit Court.

Notice what is not in that table: opinions about anybody's character. A timeline like this is how you talk to a court. Build yours the same way - one dated line per event, each line backed by a paper you can hand over.

Five rules. No exceptions.

1

The judge reads paper, not intentions.
You may be a great dad in your heart. The court only sees what is filed, logged, and exhibited. If it is not written down with a date, for the court it did not happen.

2

Short answers. One fact each.
In a hearing, in a declaration, in a text that might become an exhibit: one fact per sentence. Long emotional paragraphs bury your best fact on page three, where nobody finds it.

3

No labels. Ever.
Never call the other parent a narcissist, a liar, unstable, or evil - in filings, in court, in texts. Labels hurt *your* credibility, not hers. Quote her own words against the record instead. Contradictions hurt. Labels do not.

4

Every promise becomes paper.
A verbal "I'll send the link" is nothing. A text, an email, a filed order - that is something. After every conversation, send a calm confirming text: "Confirming what we agreed today: ___." Now it exists.

5

Your child is never the messenger.
No messages through your kid. No questions about the other home. No showing your child court paper. The visits are for your child - protect them like the court is watching, because one day it may be.

> **The test for everything you write:** Would I be proud for the judge to read this out loud, in a quiet room, with my daughter's future on the table? If not, delete it and write the calm version.

Order matters more than anger

Most dads file the loudest thing first. File the *right* thing first.

Step zero: get your own record

Before you file anything, get a complete copy of your existing case file and read your current order word for word. You cannot enforce, modify, or comply with an order you have not read. Ask the clerk how to get copies, what the register of actions shows, and whether there are orders you never received. In my case, reading the free register told me exactly what had been entered - judgment, denials, supplemental judgments, motions, mediation entries - and what was *not* public and had to be ordered from the clerk.

Know which fight you are in

IF THIS IS TRUE	YOU ARE USUALLY LOOKING AT
There is an order and it is not being followed	**Enforcement** - ask the court to enforce its own order. Attach the order. Log the violations.
There is an order, but circumstances have materially changed	**Modification** - ask to change parenting time / custody. You must show the change, not just dislike the order.
A parent moved, or plans to move, with the child	**Relocation** - notice and objection rules are deadline-driven. Act immediately; do not wait.
There is no workable order at all	**Establish / modify parenting plan** - start with your court's official packet and facilitator.
The other side is not following a specific directive (link, exchange, time)	**Enforcement + specific request** - name the exact directive and the exact fix you want.

Filing a modification when your real problem is enforcement wastes months. Filing enforcement when the order itself is unworkable wastes credibility. Name your fight correctly on page one.

The filing sequence

1. **Read the current order.**
   Highlight every date, time, place, link, exchange, and duty - yours included. Your compliance is exhibit one.

2. **Start the log today.**
   Do not wait for the next violation. Log the good visits too. A log that only records bad days looks built for court. A log that records everything looks true - because it is.

3. **Use the official packet.**
   Where your court publishes an official form - mediation, fee waiver, alternative service - use that form, filled exactly as instructed. Clerks process official forms faster because they recognize them.

4. **Write the declaration last, file it first in the reader's mind.**
   Your declaration is the story the judge reads. Dated facts, one per paragraph, each tied to an exhibit. Draft it after your exhibits are gathered, not before.

5. **Serve it correctly.**
   A perfect motion served wrong is a motion that never happened. Follow the service rule for your filing, use a process server or sheriff where required, and keep the proof of service in your folder. If a restraining order or no-contact condition exists in any related case, never serve personally - third party only, no exceptions.

6. **Calendar everything the day you file.**
   Response deadlines, mediation, hearings, service cutoffs. Put them in your phone and on paper. A missed deadline can end a good case faster than a bad fact.

> **My sequence, Sept. 2026:** Motions filed Sept. 2 (modify + enforce) → Order to Show Cause Sept. 4 → mediation Sept. 17 → enforcement hearing Sept. 21. Tight, dated, and each step created the paper for the next one.

Print this page

Starter document checklist

- [ ] Current judgment / order - complete copy, every page
- [ ] Case register of actions (docket) - printed and dated
- [ ] All prior motions, declarations, and orders in the case
- [ ] Proof of your compliance: visits kept, classes completed, conditions finished
- [ ] Government ID, proof of income, and fee-waiver information (see Ch. 10)
- [ ] A clean folder, a notebook, and one pen that lives in the folder

Filing checklist - every filing, every time

- [ ] Caption checked: full legal names, correct address, correct case number treatment
- [ ] Motion states exactly what you want the court to order, in numbered asks
- [ ] Declaration: dated facts only, one fact per paragraph, exhibits referenced by letter/number
- [ ] Exhibits labeled, in order, legible - screenshots show date, time, and who is speaking
- [ ] Proposed order included where your court expects one
- [ ] Fee paid or fee-waiver packet filed with it
- [ ] Service method chosen, lawful, and documented; proof of service kept
- [ ] One full copy for you, one for service, one for the court - never file your only copy

Hearing-day checklist

- [ ] Folder with order, declaration, exhibits, log, and pattern summary
- [ ] One-page summary: what you want, why, and the exhibit behind each point
- [ ] Arrive early; phone charged, silenced, and face-down
- [ ] Notes in pencil - you will want to add the judge's exact words

Enforcement is a story told in exhibits

The court already ordered your time. Enforcement is you proving - calmly, visit by visit - that the order is not happening, and asking the court to make it happen.

Judges see two kinds of enforcement filings. The first is ten pages of pain: how it feels, what you think it means, what kind of person the other parent is. The second is two pages of dates and a stack of captures that speak for themselves. The second kind gets a hearing that goes somewhere.

My Sept. 21, 2026 enforcement hearing is the model I teach here. The court enforced the schedule - Sundays 9:00 AM, Wednesdays 6:30 PM - and ordered the visit link to be sent. That outcome did not come from arguing harder. It came from a record specific enough that the fix was obvious: same times, same room, link sent, visits happen.

What a strong enforcement ask looks like

Ask for specific, checkable relief - not punishment. Examples of the shape (adapt to your order and your court's forms): restore the exact schedule in the order; require the link/access to be sent by a set time before each visit; award make-up time for documented missed visits, visit for visit; set a clear method for confirming visits in writing; and set a review date so the pattern is checked again. Specific asks are easy to grant. Vague asks ("make her cooperate") are easy to deny.

> **Contempt is a separate, heavier tool.** Parenting-time contempt has its own rules and, in Oregon, the standard contempt packet may not be used for parenting-time orders. Do not reach for contempt first, and do not file it without checking your court's exact requirements - ideally with a lawyer or facilitator reviewing the packet.

Enforcement, step by step: 1-4

1. **Confirm the order's exact language.**
   Quote it, do not paraphrase it. "Wednesdays at 6:30 PM" is enforceable. "Regular Wednesdays" is an argument waiting to happen. If the language is vague, note that - vagueness itself may belong in a modification ask.

2. **Show up, on time, every time - and prove you did.**
   Join early. Screenshot yourself in the room, waiting, with the clock visible. Stay a reasonable, documented time. Leave calmly. Your presence, proved, is half the exhibit.

3. **Make one calm, written attempt to fix it in the moment.**
   One text: "I'm in the room for our 6:30 visit. I don't see you yet - are we still on for tonight?" One. Not five. That single timestamped message proves you tried and gives the other side a fair chance to cure it.

4. **Log it the same night.**
   Date, scheduled time, when you joined, when you left, what happened, what you sent, screenshots saved. Facts only. Write it like the judge will read it - because the judge might. (Full system in Chapter 5.)

Do these four steps for every single visit - kept or missed - and you are no longer a dad with a complaint. You are a dad with a record.

Enforcement, step by step: 5-7

5

Build the pattern before you file.
One missed visit is a bad night. Three consecutive missed Wednesdays - Sept. 23, Sept. 30, Oct. 7 in my case - is a pattern a court can act on. Unless your child is in danger, let the pattern form, documented, rather than filing in anger after the first miss.

6

File with exhibits that match your declaration, paragraph by paragraph.
Declaration says "On Sept. 30 the room was empty at 6:30 PM" - the exhibit right behind it is the Sept. 30 capture, labeled, dated. A judge who can verify each sentence in ten seconds is a judge who believes sentence eleven.

7

At the hearing, ask for the fix - then stop talking.
State the pattern, hand up the summary, name the specific relief, and stop. Every extra minute of talking is a chance to say the one thing that costs you the credibility you just built.

If an Order to Show Cause issues

That order means the court wants the other side to appear and explain. Treat it as seriously as it sounds: keep logging, keep showing up, change nothing about your own conduct, and bring an updated log covering every visit between the order and the hearing. The pattern often continues - and your updated record is the hearing.

> **Never** withhold your own compliance to "even the score" - no missed child support games, no refusing exchanges, no keeping the child past your time. Self-help is the fastest way to turn a winning enforcement case into a losing one.

The log is the case

Memory fades in a courtroom. A log written the same night does not.

Your log has three jobs. First, it remembers for you - dates, times, exact words - six months later, under pressure, when you are nervous on the stand. Second, it disciplines you: a father who logs every visit shows up for every visit. Third, it converts a story into evidence a judge can scan.

The rules of a court-ready log

- **Same night, every visit.** Kept, missed, short, or strange - log it before you sleep.
- **Facts only.** "Room empty at 6:30. Text sent 6:34. Left 6:50." Not "she sabotaged us again."
- **Never edit an old entry.** If you remember something later, add a dated note: "Added Oct. 8: ___." Edited logs get destroyed on cross. Honest logs survive it.
- **Keep the raw captures.** Screenshots with visible date/time, saved in a folder named by date. A log entry pointing to a capture is twice as strong.
- **Log the good ones in the same detail.** "Oct. 14 - meeting was good" matters. It proves the log is a record, not a weapon.

> Keep the log in two places: the printed folder and a backed-up digital copy. Phones break. Cases do not wait for a new phone.

Visit log template

Copy this page for every visit. One page per visit. Fill it in the same night.

Date of visit		**Scheduled time**
Visit type / platform		
I joined at		**Visit started at**
Visit ended at		**Total minutes together**
Who was present		
What happened (facts only)		
What we talked about / did		
Messages sent/received (time + exact words)		
Screenshots / captures saved?	File names:	**Make-up time offered?**
Next scheduled visit		

Result code (circle one): COMPLETED • MISSED - OTHER SIDE • MISSED - MY SIDE • SHORTENED • RESCHEDULED IN WRITING

If it was missed on your side, write why, honestly, and what you did to fix it. Your own misses, owned in your own log, build more credibility than a perfect-looking log nobody believes.

When the room is empty

A missed visit hurts. Document it cold, the same night, while it still hurts - that is the discipline.

Missed-visit capture checklist

- [ ] Screenshot: you, in the room / at the exchange point, timestamp visible, at start time
- [ ] Second screenshot 15-20 minutes later - still there, still empty
- [ ] Screenshot or save your one calm check-in text, with its timestamp
- [ ] Save any reply exactly as received - do not crop the context out
- [ ] Note when you left, and total minutes you waited
- [ ] Log entry completed the same night (use the template, p. 14)
- [ ] File the captures in a folder named by date: *missed-visits / 2026-09-30*
- [ ] Note any explanation given later, with the date it was given - late explanations are part of the record too

What not to do in the empty room

Do not send a string of escalating texts. Do not call repeatedly. Do not post about it. Do not tell your child about it at the next visit. Every angry message you send becomes *her* exhibit. The father in the empty room who sends one calm text and logs it is the father the judge pictures when he signs the order.

> *"Three dead Wednesdays in a row did not need my anger to matter. They needed my screenshots, my timestamps, and my log. The pattern spoke."*

Turn the log into one page

Before any hearing, compress your log into a one-page pattern summary. This is the page a busy judge actually reads. Example below is my real Wednesday pattern, fall 2026 - build yours in exactly this shape.

DATE	SCHEDULED	RESULT	PROOF
Wed, Sept. 23, 2026	6:30 PM video	Did not happen	Room capture
Wed, Sept. 30, 2026	6:30 PM video	Did not happen	Room capture
Sun, Oct. 4, 2026	9:00 AM video	Happened - first Sunday after two dead Wednesdays	Log entry
Wed, Oct. 7, 2026	6:30 PM video	Did not happen - third consecutive Wednesday	Room capture + text thread
Wed, Oct. 14, 2026	6:30 PM video	Happened - "Meeting was good"	Log entry

How to write the summary line

End the table with one counted sentence, nothing more: *"Of ___ scheduled visits between ___ and ___, ___ occurred, ___ were missed without make-up time offered, totaling ___ minutes of ordered parenting time lost."* Counted, dated, provable. That sentence, backed by captures, is worth more than ten pages of argument.

> Bring three copies of the pattern summary to every hearing: judge, other side, you. Hand yours up calmly when the judge asks what you are requesting - not before, not as a speech.

Mediation is not a formality

In Jackson County, mediation comes before a judge hears a contested custody or parenting-time case. Treat it like the hearing before the hearing - because anything you agree to there can become the order.

My Sept. 17, 2026 mediation was marked a failure to appear. It was rescheduled to Monday, Oct. 26, 2026, at 11:00 AM, by phone or video. Lesson one is simple: a missed mediation does not make the issue go away. It makes your next in front of the judge harder, and it hands the other side a story about who is cooperating. Confirm the date, the time, the join details, and who is supposed to appear - in writing, days ahead, not the morning of.

What mediation can and cannot do

A mediator does not decide your case. The mediator helps both sides reach an agreement the court can adopt. That means mediation rewards the parent who arrives with a specific, child-focused, workable proposal - days, times, holidays, exchanges, communication method, make-up time - and it exposes the parent who arrives with only complaints. Come with a plan you could live with if the judge signed it that afternoon, because that is close to what can happen.

Your proposal, on one page

Draft it before the session: regular schedule, holiday and summer schedule, how visits happen (in person / video, who hosts, link by when), exchange logistics, how schedule changes get requested and confirmed, make-up time rule, and how the parents communicate about the child - in writing, about the child only. Bring two copies.

Mediation prep checklist

- [ ] Date, time, mediator name, and join details confirmed in writing
- [ ] Court Mediation Program contact saved (Jackson County: (541) 776-7171 ext. 35043 - verify for your county)
- [ ] Current order read; the sections in dispute highlighted
- [ ] One-page proposal printed (schedule, holidays, exchanges, make-up time, communication)
- [ ] Visit log + pattern summary in the folder - patterns, not speeches
- [ ] Your bottom lines decided in advance: what you can accept, what you cannot, and why - in child-focused reasons
- [ ] Calendar open for the next 6 months: work schedule, holidays, school breaks
- [ ] Phone charged, quiet room, water, pen - for a phone/video session, test the connection early

In the session

Speak about your child's needs, in the future tense: school nights, bedtimes, travel time, consistency. Propose, do not accuse. If the other side raises the past, answer once, briefly, with a date - then return to the proposal. If you reach agreement, read it back slowly before you sign anything, and get a copy. If you do not reach agreement, leave calm, log the session the same night, and note exactly what you proposed - your proposal becomes part of your story at the hearing.

> **Never agree under pressure to a schedule you cannot actually keep.** A kept modest schedule beats a broken generous one, every time, in front of every judge.

What to say in the room

A hearing is not a conversation and it is not a performance. It is a record. Speak for the transcript.

The shape of a good answer

- **Answer the question that was asked** - not the one you wish had been asked, not the whole history.
- **Lead with the date and the document.** "On September 30, Your Honor - Exhibit B shows the room at 6:30 PM." Dates and exhibits first, explanation second.
- **One fact per answer.** When you finish the fact, stop. Silence after a good answer is strength.
- **"I don't remember" is allowed.** Guessing on the record is not. If the log knows, say: "My log for that date says ___ - may I refer to it?"
- **Address the judge, not the other parent.** "Your Honor" - never across the room, never directly at her.

Phrases that work

SAY THIS	WHY IT WORKS
"I am asking the court to enforce the schedule already ordered: Sundays 9 AM, Wednesdays 6:30 PM."	Specific, modest, checkable.
"That is not my recollection. The text on [date] says ___."	Disagrees with a document, not a person.
"I have kept every visit offered to me. My log shows ___."	Your compliance, counted.
"I will follow whatever schedule the court orders."	The sentence judges trust most - if it is true.

What never to say

NEVER SAY	SAY INSTEAD / DO INSTEAD
"She's a narcissist / she's crazy / she's evil"	Nothing. Let the documents describe conduct. Labels describe *you* to the judge.
"She's lying"	"The record shows ___ on [date]." Quote her own words against the document.
"She always / she never..."	Counts and dates: "Three of the last four Wednesdays."
Diagnoses, drug or health claims without proof	Only what a record, test, or professional document actually states.
Anything about what your child "told you" the other parent does, as a speech	If it must be raised, raise it through counsel/facilitator guidance - hearsay and coaching concerns are real.
Threats, ultimatums, or "you'll see"	Nothing. Ever. On or off the record, in any text, at any hour.
A long story when a date was asked for	The date. Then wait for the next question.

If you get provoked

It can happen - a claim lands that is not true and your blood goes up. Breathe. Look at your notes. Answer the provable part in one sentence and stop. Her outburst only helps you if her own documents cause it; your outburst only helps her, immediately and completely. The calmest man in the room is rarely the one who loses it.

> **Cross-examination rule I live by:** short, leading questions, one fact each, each one pinned to a document the witness cannot move. No speeches disguised as questions.

Declaration structure that works

SAMPLE STRUCTURE - EDUCATIONAL ONLY. Adapt with your court's official forms and, ideally, a lawyer or family-law facilitator reviewing your final draft. Replace every bracket. Do not file language you cannot prove.

DECLARATION OF [YOUR FULL LEGAL NAME] IN SUPPORT OF [MOTION NAME]

1. I am the Respondent in this matter and the father of [child's name / initials as your court requires], born [year if required]. I make this declaration from my own knowledge.

2. On [date], this Court ordered parenting time as follows: [quote the exact schedule from the order]. A true copy of that order is attached as Exhibit A.

3. I have complied with the order as follows: [your compliance, dated - conditions completed, visits kept, obligations met].

4. On [date], the scheduled visit [did not occur / was shortened] as follows: [facts only - times, platform, who was present]. The capture / message recording this is attached as Exhibit [ ].

5. On [date], the same occurred: [repeat the paragraph above, one missed visit per paragraph].

6. In total, of [number] scheduled visits between [date] and [date], [number] occurred and [number] did not. No make-up time was offered for [number] of the missed visits.

Notice the discipline: each numbered paragraph is one topic, dated, and tied to paper. A declaration written this way can be checked in minutes - and being easy to check is what makes it believable.

Declaration: closing + exhibits

7. I attempted to resolve this without court action as follows: [dated, calm attempts - one message per attempt, quoted or attached].

8. I am asking the Court to order: (a) [specific relief - e.g., the link for each video visit be sent no later than ___ minutes before the scheduled time]; (b) [make-up time, visit for visit, for the ___ documented missed visits]; (c) [a review hearing in ___ days]; and (d) [any other specific, checkable relief tied to your order].

9. I will comply with the schedule and every condition the Court orders.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of [state] that the foregoing is true and correct.

Signed: _____ Date: _____
[FULL LEGAL NAME], Respondent, appearing pro se [if true]

Exhibit list - build it in this order

EXHIBIT	CONTENTS
A	The current order you are asking the court to enforce or modify
B	Pattern summary - one page, counted (see p. 16)
C	Missed-visit captures, in date order, one visit per section
D	The complete message thread for any exchange you quote - complete, not cropped
E	Any record that proves a disputed fact: completion certificates, official letters, relocation / address records

Rule: if your declaration mentions it, it is exhibited. If you cannot exhibit it, soften the sentence to what you can prove - or cut it. Half of credibility is what you leave out.

Answer paper with paper

When an allegation lands, your instinct will be volume. Your answer has to be records.

You will be served with things that do not sound like your life. In my case, the other side's September 2026 filings included a statement, a letter from a services organization, and a restraining order from a separate case involving a former partner - presented as exhibits in my custody case. I dispute the framing of those papers. But disputing is not a strategy. Here is the strategy:

1. **Read it twice. Answer nothing the first day.**
   Highlight every factual claim - date, place, event. Ignore every adjective. Adjectives need no rebuttal; claims do.

2. **Sort each claim: provably false, provably true, or opinion.**
   True claims get context, not denial. Opinion gets silence. Only provably false claims get a rebuttal - with the record attached.

3. **Build the rebuttal file claim by claim.**
   Completion certificates beat "I finished the program." A discharge paper beats "I am off parole." A mediation record beats an argument about who showed up. One record per claim, labeled.

4. **Do not counter-attack with your own labels.**
   A rebuttal that ends in name-calling erases itself. End on the document: "The attached certificate is dated ___. The claim on page ___ says the opposite."

The rebuttal records table

IF THE CLAIM IS ABOUT	THE RECORD THAT ANSWERS IT
A program or class: incomplete / never attended	Completion certificate or attendance record from the provider, with dates
Parole / supervision status	Discharge or status letter from the supervising authority
Mediation: you did not show	Mediation program record, confirmation emails, call logs - from the program, not your memory
Missed visits: you missed them	Your visit log + captures, kept contemporaneously (Ch. 5)
Relocation / where a parent lives	The addresses and dates as they appear in filed papers and court records - quoted, not summarized
Your character, in general	Dated, specific references from people who have seen you parent, work, and show up - not a stack of generic praise

Restraining orders and related cases

If a protective order exists in any related case - against you or involving people around the case - obey it absolutely, and get legal advice about contesting it within its deadline. In Oregon, that window can be as short as 30 days from service. Never contact a protected person directly for any reason, including service of your own case: use a sheriff or process server. One violation can take a custody case you were winning and end it.

> **Keep every allegation in its lane:** a claim is a claim until a court finds it true. In your filings, write "Petitioner alleges ___; the attached record shows ___." That sentence structure protects you and persuades at the same time.

Fee waivers: the $858 I did not pay

Being broke is not a reason to stop filing. Courts know that, and most have a waiver process. Use it - correctly, completely, and early.

Across my case from 2024 to 2026, my court fees totaled $858 - and every dollar was waived. That is not a loophole. That is the system working as designed, for a father who filled out the packet honestly and filed it with his motions instead of after them.

How a fee waiver usually works

- Ask the clerk for the **official fee-waiver / deferral packet** for your court. In Oregon it is the Oregon Judicial Department packet - use the official blank, not a homemade version.
- Fill it with real numbers: income, benefits, expenses, dependents. Honest numbers, documented where the form asks. A waiver denied for sloppiness can be refiled; a waiver denied for dishonesty follows you.
- File the waiver **with** the motion it belongs to, so the filing is not held up for a fee you do not have.
- Keep the granted order in your folder. You will be asked to prove the waiver exists - at the next filing, and the next.
- Know the limit: waivers cover court filing fees. They do not cover everything - hearing audio and records copies, for example, were a cost I had to pay myself (see next page).

> Do not let a filing fee choose your deadline for you. If money is the obstacle between you and a filing date, the waiver packet is the first form you pick up - this week, not the week the deadline lands.

Get the record. Read the register.

The register of actions is your map

Your case register (docket) lists everything entered, in order, with dates. Reading mine told me the real history of my case: the 2022 judgment, the 2024 hearing and denial, the July 2026 supplemental judgments, my September motions, the mediation entry, the enforcement hearing. It also told me what it does *not* show - the contents of orders are not public in the register. For those, you order the actual documents from the clerk.

Hearing audio is worth paying for

I paid $10 for the audio of my July 29, 2024, July 6, 2026, and Sept. 21, 2026 hearings - fee waivers did not apply to the records request - and transcribed them. It changed the case. Claims about what was "admitted" or "agreed" at a hearing collapse when you have the actual words. One hearing I remembered as a disaster contained, on the audio, the other parent disclosing a relocation on the record. My memory missed it. The audio did not.

Records-to-request list

- [ ] Complete current order + every supplemental / corrected judgment
- [ ] Register of actions, updated after every filing and hearing
- [ ] Audio of every substantive hearing in your case
- [ ] Any order entered at a hearing you attended whose contents you have not seen
- [ ] Proof of service for everything served on you - and everything you served
- [ ] Download audio and documents before any link expiry date - note the cutoff in your calendar the day the link arrives

Store records in dated folders, backed up. Transcribe hearings while they are fresh enough that the transcript can be checked against your log.

Real mistakes I made

This chapter is the one I would pay for, if I were you. Learn these on paper instead of in a courtroom.

Mistake 1: Trusting verbal promises

Early on, I believed agreements made out loud would be honored as spoken. Some were not, and with nothing in writing I had a memory against a denial. **Cost:** months, and credibility I had to earn back with paper. **Fix:** Rule 4 - every promise becomes a confirming text the same day.

Mistake 2: Not logging from day one

I started documenting seriously later than I should have. The visits I cannot prove are visits the court cannot count, no matter how clearly I remember the empty room. **Cost:** the earliest pattern - the one that might have moved things fastest - exists only in my memory. **Fix:** the log starts tonight, not after the next problem (p. 14).

Mistake 3: Writing angry and sending it

Every father in this fight has drafted the text that says everything he feels. The ones who send it hand the other side an exhibit with their name on it. I learned to write it, read it, and delete it - then write the one-fact version. **Cost:** every sent angry message is permanent, screenshot-able, and readable aloud by someone who does not love you. **Fix:** nothing about the case gets sent after 9 PM or within an hour of a missed visit. Nothing.

What the mistakes cost

Mistake 4: Trying to win the argument instead of the order

There were moments I cared more about being proven right about the past than about getting the next visit enforced. Courts do not award you the past. They order the future. **Fix:** every filing ends with specific, future, checkable asks (p. 10).

Mistake 5: Letting other cases bleed into this one

Breakups, former partners, other courts, other orders - the people around a custody case can drag it sideways, and papers from other cases can end up exhibited in yours. Keep your contact clean, obey every order in every case, and never let a side fight create a violation in the main one. **Cost if you do:** the custody judge hears about the side case first, and your parenting time pays for it.

Mistake 6: Waiting to ask for the record

Orders I had not read, hearing contents I had not heard, a register I had not pulled - every gap in my own record was a surprise waiting for me. **Fix:** Chapter 10. Pull the register monthly. Order the audio. Read everything with your name on it.

> **The thread through all six:** none of them were about being a bad father. All of them were about paper, timing, and discipline. That is good news - paper, timing, and discipline can be fixed starting today, by any dad, at any income.

Your first 90 days

WHEN	DO THIS
Days 1-7	Get your complete case file and register. Read your current order word for word. Start the visit log tonight. Set up the folder system (physical + digital backup).
Days 8-14	Build your timeline (p. 5 shape). Visit the court facilitator / self-help center. Pick up the official packets for your fight: enforcement, modification, mediation, fee waiver.
Days 15-30	Log every visit. Confirm every agreement in writing. Gather rebuttal records for any live allegation (Ch. 9 table). Order hearing audio for past substantive hearings.
Days 31-45	Draft your declaration from your log and exhibits - or prepare for mediation with the one-page proposal (p. 17). Have a facilitator or lawyer review before filing if at all possible.
Days 46-60	File, serve correctly, calendar every deadline the filing creates. Keep logging through the waiting period - the pattern in this window becomes your hearing.
Days 61-90	Build the pattern summary. Rehearse your hearing answers: dates, exhibits, one fact each. Hearing-day checklist (p. 9) the night before. Show up early, calm, and documented.

Miss a week? Do not restart the clock in your head and do not quit. Pick the plan up at the day you are on. Courts respect fathers who keep going more than fathers who started perfectly.

FINAL WORD

Fathers don't fold.

On July 6, 2026 - my birthday, after six years - I saw my daughter again on a court-ordered video visit. No lawyer handed me that day. Paper did. A log did. Showing up, documented and calm, on the days when the room was empty and on the days when it was not, did.

Your child does not need you to be perfect. Your child needs you to be *present* - and in a custody case, presence is proved on paper, visit by visit, until the court cannot picture this child's life without you in it.

Start tonight. Print the checklists. Open the log. Write the first entry - even if tonight's entry is just: "Bought the playbook. Starting tomorrow." Date it. That is entry one. That is how a record begins.

- Desmond T. Cloyd
Medford, Oregon • Father of Shastina

Dad's Custody Playbook - Digital Edition, $37. Educational only; not legal advice; not a substitute for a licensed attorney or your court's official forms and facilitators. Case details are the author's own, drawn from Jackson County Circuit Court Case No. 22DR05472 and his own records. Verify all procedures, deadlines, and forms with your own court before filing.

Templates in this book - visit log, checklists, pattern summary, declaration structure - may be printed and copied for your own personal case use.