

The children always are in the middle

THE CASE is out of the courts. It appears that Dale Berne has won and that his divorced wife, Harriet, has lost in the long and torturous battle for custody of their two children.

It has seemed like an all too familiar tragic soap opera for its twists and turns — the search for two years by Berne, the principal of Eastwidge High School, ended Tuesday in a Houston, Texas, courtroom. Then, the mother apparently took an overdose of drugs and is in intensive care in a Houston hospital.

The children — first enduring a separation, then wrenched away from their father, now taken from their mother — must be given first consideration in any proceedings that may follow.

As Jack Jones pointed out in a *D&C* article this week, nobody knows how much the children of Harriet and Dale Berne have suffered.

This is a case, like so many others involving children who are buffeted back and forth, where winning by either side doesn't mean much.

Unfortunately, the case isn't finished.

Houston Family Court Judge Bruce Wertman said he expects the merits of custody will be argued in a New York state court. The judge says the mother will undoubtedly have her day in court since the hearing in Texas was only on a writ claiming the two boys were being held illegally in Houston.

Mrs. Berne could face charges of custodial interference if local authorities win extradition proceedings and can bring her back.

It could be an even longer ordeal. And as always, the children will be caught in the middle.