

# **Computer games take toll in schools, say nurses**

*By CATHERINE BAUM Staff Writer*

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EASTHAMPTON – Area nurses advise students to take a break from their television, PlayStation 2 or Xbox as too much screen time will deprive them mentally, physically and socially.

"I think there are a lot of kids with working families today where a parent is not around to structure and set rules about video games," said Angela Sears, school nurse at Center Elementary School.

Sears, who sets a timer for her two sons to allow them each 15 minutes on the computer, said many times whatever's on the screen deprives children of critical thinking. While the main goal is entertainment, students soak in the messages that these shows and game deliver.

"That's all they eat, sleep and breathe," she said.

Jeanne Moran, the district's registered nurse, said she believes the violence and inappropriate language in television shows stir students to violent behavior, especially at the high school. Besides violence toward others, some students punch their lockers to relieve the stress. After an altercation in the classroom this year, Moran said one student punched his hand through a glass window and was taken to the hospital for stitches.

"I'm surprised how much they fight," said Moran, who said there is at least one fight a week at the high school. "I think they see fighting so much in the video games. It's all about fighting."

Meanwhile, the way students position themselves while watching the screen can also be detrimental to their health. If children are sitting in a "W" position -- knees in front of them and legs turned back -- they can "throw out" their hips and back, said Renee Maiolo, nurse at White Brook Middle School. Poor posture or shrugged-up shoulders can cause stiffness and muscle spasms, she added.

"When I ask them 'what did you do yesterday' when they say they don't feel good, and they say they played video games or sat in front of the computer & 'Well, maybe your back hurts because you don't move,' I want to say," Maiolo said.

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## **In memory of Lexie**



KEVIN GUTTING

*Easthampton High School 2007 graduates Wendi Liebl, left, and Davi Chuong, center, hold balloons addressed to their former volleyball teammate Alexis Garcia.*

EASTHAMPTON – It was a year ago Saturday that Lexie Garcia, an Easthampton High School junior, drowned in the family bathtub after suffering from alcohol poisoning. To remember the late student, three of Garcia's close friends, Amanda Flechsig, Shana Skubiszewski and Jessica Wiseman, arranged a balloon launch for Feb. 2.

About 150 classmates, friends and relatives showed up to release balloons. They chose pink, Garcia's favorite color. Garcia's friends and Gail Canon, guidance counselor at the high school, made an introductory speech.

"They were all broken up," said Robin Fortier, Garcia's aunt, of her late niece's friends. "They were in tears."

There was a moment of silence for Garcia before 150 balloons took flight in Pulaski Park.

"It was kind of neat when they all went up," Fortier said.

Some balloons got caught in the trees, but eventually launched into the sky with a little help from the wind.

Almost everybody wrote messages on their balloons, many of which said "I miss you" and "I love you." The event - free of snow and rain - lasted for about 45 minutes.

"It was a very nice tribute to her," Fortier said.

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