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on your cell phone while you walk is a distraction.

Don't talk to strangers: It was good advice when you were a kid, and it's good advice now.

Trust your instincts: If you think someone is following you, you can use a compact mirror or a store window to look behind you. Change your route and head toward a populated area.

If you do find yourself in a dangerous situation, Crandall said these techniques might help you get away:

Throw something: Even a crumpled piece of paper might distract your attacker long enough for you to escape.

Ditch the purse: If you have a purse or money with you, throw it in the direction opposite your escape route. "You're hoping that's what they're after anyway, so let them go get it," Crandall said.

If you need to fight: Try to hit your attacker in the eyes or in the knees. Crandall said today's baggier clothing styles make a kick to the groin less effective, and those other areas are weak points for attackers of either gender.

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By **COURTNEY POTTS**

Observer-Dispatch

Posted May 17, 2010 @ 09:18 PM

Last update May 17, 2010 @ 09:19 PM

NEW HARTFORD — Grand Master Clifford Crandall Jr. of the **American Martial Arts Institute** in New Hartford is internationally recognized for his martial arts experience and has published several books and instructional DVDs on self-defense for all ages.

Crandall's tips for staying safe include the following:

Stay alert: Keep your head up and look around at your surroundings as you walk.

Put down your phone: This falls under staying alert. Texting or playing games



Weapons

Guns

- Shotguns with barrels less than 18 inches in length
- Rifles with barrels less than 16 inches in length
- Modified shotguns or rifles with a total length less than 26 inches.
- Machine guns

Knives

- Switchblades
- Gravity knives
- Ballistic knives
- Metal knuckle knives
- Cane swords

Other

- Electronic dart guns
- Electronic stun guns, including Tasers
- Blackjacks
- Metal or plastic knuckles
- Chuka sticks or kung fu stars

Note: While some exceptions exist for law enforcement officials or for specific uses, such as hunting or target shooting at a firing range, the possession of any one of the weapons can result in a charge of fourth-degree criminal possession of a weapon, a misdemeanor.