Suggested phrases/techniques for approaching patrons who may have mental illness
--from the webinar, “Serving Mentally-Ill Library Users: A Crash Course on Controlling Clashes”
(presented 05/25/2016 by State Library of Iowa)
--compiled by Mandy Easter, state law librarian

- Sometimes it can be easier to make a statement rather than ask a question.

- (When dealing with person who smells bad) “I need to let you know that, because you haven’t showered in a while, your body odor is noticeable and disturbing to others. Here is a list of places you can go to take a shower. We need you to leave and not return until after you have showered.”

- Be polite. Try a lighter touch first.
  --“I noticed that…”
  --“The reason I’m here is…”
  --“I’m sure you already know this, but…”
  --“I need to ask you to…”

- Do NOT say,
  --“You need to calm down, sir!”
  --“That’s not our policy.”
  --“What you need to understand is…”
  --“I can’t help you and I don’t know who can.”

- Further on in the conversation, these phrases can have a calming effect:
  --“I can see that you’re upset…”
  --“I’m sorry; I’m not trying to make you mad.”
  --“You could be right…”
  --“It’s not me, it’s the computer…”
  --“Please help me do my job for you…”
  --“I can take your name and number for my supervisor, if you’d like…”

- Use firm, assertive, but not aggressive, language. Avoid a tone of voice or the use of phrases that might be considered judgmental, moralizing, or condescending. Try not to show anger, fear, disapproval or disgust.

- Do not share your anecdotal stories to demonstrate that you understand; this may convey the wrong message. For example, do not mention “my aunt with the same thing.”

- Don’t be hesitant or appear unsure of yourself.

- Focus on the inappropriate behavior, not the patron. Rather than saying, “You are disturbing other patrons,” kindly say, “Yelling and slamming down books are inappropriate behaviors in the library.”

- Remember to address the situation and the action rather than the person.