

# ROMANCE IN SPOTLIGHT



**DON'T JUST PAY LIP SERVICE:** Romantic couple and (below) Michaela Brady

## Unlocking the secrets of love

WHEN it comes to love, why do so many relationships fall apart, while others improve with time?

As a psychotherapist, I've supported many clients through the highs and lows of love.

I've learned from their stories and developed insights from a few of my own.

Here are my signs that you are in a great relationship - and how to get back on track, if not.

**GOTTMAN ASSESSMENT:** The 'Gottman Method' is the world's first relationship wellness measurement tool. It analyses strengths and weaknesses in key areas, including friendship and intimacy, sex and passion, conflict management, shared meaning and trust and commitment. You receive an overall score plus a tailored plan to strengthen your connection.

**MAKE THE EFFORT:** Falling in love is easy when you have chemistry, common interests and shared values. It's called the "honeymoon phase" - but with time, issues arise, feathers get ruffled and efforts can dim. If your relationship is to thrive, it's essential to invest some of the effort so freely given at the start. Show through actions and words that you value, respect and appreciate each other.

**CREATE TRUST:** It's not just about being faithful; rather showing up in ways that signal you can be relied upon. It's crucial to take accountability and use mistakes as learning curves. It's a red flag if the apology is insincere or not backed by behavioural change. A refusal to apologise or acknowledge feelings, shows a lack of empathy.

■ Michaela BRADY

### IMPROVE COMMUNICATION:

Communication forms the basis of all relationships and can enhance or destroy them. Ask yourself how you can convey what you need to say in a clear, open and respectful way. Make "I" not "you" statements to replace the blame game with taking ownership of wants, needs and feelings. Don't interrupt.

**CONFLICT RESOLUTION:** Conflict is an inevitable part of relationships when expectations and needs clash. If you are having disputes, it's most likely the same type of row. Resolving conflict requires expressing yourself in respectful ways and replacing criticism with constructive feedback.

**PUT THE PHONE DOWN:** Our phone connects us to those far away and disconnects us from those close by. It's disrespectful, devaluing and frustrating if someone is constantly scrolling. Do a phone detox during quality time together.

**HAVE FUN:** When providing relationship coaching, I always ask: "What time do you allocate to have fun?" Tricky - especially if you are at loggerheads. But sometimes we need to put a pin in it, take a break from the stresses of life and have a date night. A relationship is like a bank account, if you want the long term benefits you must invest the effort.

■ Michaela Brady is a psychotherapist, consultant and speaker. She runs Aspire Counselling and Psychotherapy. See [aspirecounselling.com](http://aspirecounselling.com).



# A HIRE LOVE...

## Singer rents himself out to lonely ladies... with a choice of packages

■ Louise WALSH

A CLASSICALLY trained singer is renting himself out for Valentine's Day - with prices from €200 for the one-hour "friend zone" to €2,000 for a three-hour date and unlimited handholding.

Civil servant Antony O'Flaherty (57) said yesterday he was expecting "an avalanche" of requests after putting himself on social media offering four separate packages.

For €200, companionless ladies can get the "friend zone" which is one hour of "basic hanging out".

However, its details warn: "No touching or hand holding. Just to make you feel less lonely".

The 'innocent romance' package costs €350 and is described as a "one-hour walk along the beach or in the park. Handholding in private only. No photos".

### Tongue

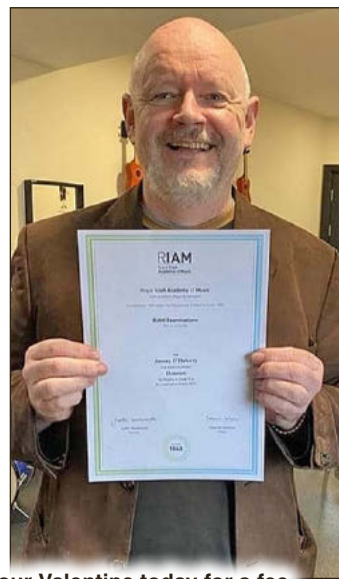
Antony says for €800, lovelorn ladies can get the 'we're almost official package' - a two-hour evening date, including a meal or ice cream up to the value of €100.

This includes public hand holding and private kiss goodnight "without tongue". An extra €50 will allow him to pose for an Instagram pic.

And finally for a cool €2,000, investors in love will re-



**DATES:** Antony O'Flaherty will be your Valentine today for a fee



ceive a three-hour date, dinner and the movies with CDs and chocolates and unlimited handholding and a kiss goodnight.

The lucky lady's name will also appear in Antony's Instagram bio for seven days.

Antony, based in Dublin but originally from Bradford in the UK, hasn't had any offers yet, after posting on several community pages but was yesterday expecting a late rush on his services.

And he hasn't even ruled out a

free serenade on the day.

He admitted that the tongue-in-cheek post is being taken in the good spirit it was meant and has given a lot of people a lot of laughs.

He said: "It's all a bit of craic really. Some people go over the top for Valentine's Day while others can find it very lonely. I just wanted to lighten the mood a bit and give people something to laugh about."

"No offers yet but plenty of good fun comments and laughing emojis."

### Discretion

"And sure why not go in for a penny and in for a pound! I'm between girlfriends myself at the minute so you never know. I might just find someone to hold hands with on Wednesday!"

"Discretion is assured, what happens in the romance stays in the romance. And I'm open to payment plans."

"Being a classically trained singer, a serenade could even be in the offering for those with generous tips."

### WHAT'S ON OFFER

**'FRIEND ZONE' PACKAGE (€200)** - One hour of basic hanging out. No touching or hand holding.

**'INNOCENT ROMANCE' PACKAGE (€350)** - One-hour walk along the beach or in the park. Hand holding in private only. No photos.

**'WE'RE ALMOST OFFICIAL' PACKAGE (€800)** - Two-hour evening date, including a meal or ice cream up to the value of €100. Includes public hand holding and private kiss goodnight without tongue. Instagram pic €50 extra.

**'WE'RE DATING' PACKAGE (€2,000)** - Three-hour date, dinner and the movies with CDs and chocolates provided. Unlimited hand holding and a kiss goodnight. Your name will also appear in Antony's Instagram bio for seven days.